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**Wikipedia Conflict Representation in Articles of War: A critical
discourse analysis of current, on-going, socio-political Wikipedia
articles about war**

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Wikipedia Conflict Representation in Articles of War

**A critical discourse analysis of
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Wikipedia articles about war**

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Abstract

With the help of a discourse-historical approach, a textual corpus composed of the talk pages of three controversial, socio-political Wikipedia articles about ongoing wars was analyzed in order to shed light on the way in which conflict is represented through the editing and discussion process. Additionally, a rational discourse was employed in order to unravel communication distortions within the editing process in an attempt to improve communication and consensus-seeking. Finally, semi-structured interviews of participating contributors within studied articles were used in order to better understand Wikipedian experience in a controversial collaboration scenario. Results unveiled a set of discursive practices in which Wikipedians participate, as well as the creation of a Wikipedian argumentation topoi framework useful for further Wikipedia-specific discourse analysis involving the content change-retain negotiation process.

Contents

Abstract	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Research Questions	6
2. A look into Wikipedia	10
2.1. What Wikipedia is Not	10
2.2. Wiki Technology, Anatomy and Language	12
2.3. Gate-keeping	15
2.4. Wikipedians	16
2.5. Contributor Participation	20
2.6. Wikipedia governance	22
3. Wikipedia Analysis	27
3.1. Wikipedia as a community	27
3.1.1. Space	29
3.1.2. Practice	29
3.1.3. Shared resources and support	31
3.1.4. Shared identities	32
3.1.5. Interpersonal relationships	33
3.2. Conflict in Wikipedia	34
3.2.1. Content creation	34
3.2.2. Controversy	40
3.2.3. Conflict resolutions	43
3.3. Power and Wikipedia	49
3.3.1. Objective notions of power	50
3.3.2. Subjective notions of power	51
3.3.3. Political, cultural and economic power in Wikipedia	53
3.3.4. Symmetrical and asymmetrical power relations in Wikipedia	56
4. Methodology	59
4.1. Introduction	59
4.2. Critical Discourse Analysis	62
4.2.1. Definition of Fields of Action	64
4.2.2. Wikipedia discourse topics	69
4.2.3. Application of CDA	77
4.2.4. Theoretical Interpretation	84

4.3. Habermas' Validity claims	85
4.4. Semi-structured Interview	90
4.4.1. Selection of Interviewees.....	92
4.4.2. Operationalization	95
4.4.3. Research Ethics	99
4.4.4. Data Collection	100
5. Talk page analysis.....	102
5.1. Data Treatment.....	102
5.2. Contextual Differences.....	107
5.3. Wikipedian Relationship with Governance in a Contentious Context.....	112
5.1.1. Policy Interpretation	113
5.1.2. Policy Enforcement	120
5.1.3. Policy Challenge.....	122
5.1.4. Neutral Point of View.....	126
5.2. Wikipedian Struggle for Definition	130
5.2.1. Meaning.....	130
5.2.2. Naming	134
5.2.3. Clarity/ambiguity.....	140
5.2.4. Due/undue Weight.....	145
5.3. Wikipedian Legitimization of Media.....	148
5.3.1. Mainstream Media.....	149
5.3.2. Verifiability/Reliability	154
5.3.3. Duality	160
5.4. Wikipedian Framing of Content	165
5.4.1. Delimitation of Conflict.....	165
5.4.2. Article Scope	168
5.4.3. Article Organization	171
6. Conflict Analysis.....	177
6.1. Who participates in the war?	179
6.2. State owned media vs independent media	199
6.3. Framing the war	205
7. Interview analysis.....	217
7.1. Wikipedians: Motivation and Community	218
7.1.1. Altruism.....	218
7.1.2. Relationships	220
7.1.3. The Good Wikipedian.....	223

7.2. Wikipedians, Media and Communications.....	224
7.2.1. Access to Information.....	225
7.2.2. Reliability of Mainstream Media.....	227
7.2.3. Wikipedian Influence on Media.....	231
7.3. Wikipedians: Rules and Philosophy.....	234
7.3.1. Wikipedian uses of policy.....	234
7.3.2. The Search for Neutrality.....	237
7.4. Wikipedians and their Concerns.....	240
7.4.1. The Problems with Wikipedia.....	241
7.4.2. Wikipedian Stress.....	247
7.4.3. Administrator involvement.....	251
7.4.4. Advocacy Groups.....	253
7.4.5. Disruptive Strategies.....	255
7.5. Wikipedians and Geopolitics.....	259
7.5.1. Political Slanting.....	259
7.5.2. Virtual Fog of War.....	262
7.5.3. Fringe Conflicts.....	264
8. Conclusions.....	268
9. References.....	276

Figure 1: What Wikipedia is Not (Wikipedia: What Wikipedia is Not, 2017).....	11
Figure 2: Wikipedia namespaces.....	13
Figure 3: Types of users (Forte and Bruckman, 2008).....	18
Figure 4: Special Power users.....	20
Figure 5: Response Patterns (Kane et al. 2014).....	38
Figure 6: contributor roles (Kane et al. 2014).....	39
Figure 7: Consensus Stage (Yasseri et al. 2012).....	42
Figure 8: Power Plays (Kriplean et al. 2007).....	48
Figure 9: Current Events.....	60
Figure 10: Ongoing conflicts.....	61
Figure 11: Deliberation objects.....	73
Figure 12: Discourse topics.....	76
Figure 13: Discursive Strategies (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).....	79
Figure 14: Discourse Model.....	80
Figure 15: Wikipedia discursive strategies.....	83
Figure 16: Habermas' validity claims (Cukier, Bauer and Middleton (2004).....	87
Figure 17: Wikipedia topoi.....	106
Figure 18: top word count tables.....	109
Figure 19: War in Donbass.....	110
Figure 20: War in Darfur.....	111
Figure 21: War in Yemen.....	112
Figure 22: February 2007 edit which solved the content dispute.....	140
Figure 23: Discussion layout.....	179
Figure 24: Dilemmas in Wikipedia practices.....	180
Figure 25: STC Deliberation timeline.....	182
Figure 26: number of references used in STC dispute.....	198
Figure 27: Arguments provided for the state-owned media poll.....	202
Figure 28: Ukrainian Conflict Name Change Arguments.....	213

I declare that all material contained in this thesis is my own work.

1. Introduction

The Internet's arrival during the late 20th century has changed the world into becoming more interconnected, creating the possibility for instantaneous asynchronous communication that can produce faster and more reliable information exchange. These practices manifest within Wikipedia. The site is a hub where knowledge is stored and disseminated faster than with any other past encyclopedias or other different types of knowledge compendiums. Furthermore, people only require an internet connection in order to gain immediate access to its vast network of information.

With over five and a half million articles just in its English version (Wikipedia: Size of Wikipedia, 2017), Wikipedia has become the largest encyclopedia in world history and the most popular online reference source (Höchstötter, Lewandowski, 2009). This success story (Ransbotham, Kane, 2009; Reagle, 2008) is based on its collaborative knowledge technology, and an online community that often covers events in real-time which seems to be working well despite finding itself in frequent states of disagreement (Kane et al 2011; Matei, Dobrescu, 2011). Thus, Wikipedia offers easy and immediate access to current knowledge given its unique updating capacity. Due to this quality, Wikipedia can be a great education tool for those seeking information not only about general knowledge and historic events, but also about current issues which have traditionally been featured in news media rather than encyclopedic repositories. Thus, Wikipedia is understood as a live collaboration project that differs from traditional historic encyclopedias.

Traditional encyclopedias were printed in paper, which meant that any update would require a full reprint of a new edition. This was done sparingly because a new edition would not be feasible every time small amounts of information required changes. Unlike encyclopedias printed on paper, Wikipedia can be updated immediately at the click of a button. These updates will appear live, in real-time, without having to go through

traditional editing processes. Furthermore, historic articles can constantly be updated as further studies and research emerge and old paradigms are questioned. However, this also presents a challenge for Wikipedia as an important social phenomenon and a knowledge asset. Wikipedia itself states (Wikipedia: Wikipedia:About, 2017) that “not all articles are of encyclopedic quality from the start: they may contain false or debatable information”.

This dissertation deals with the context of current wars and how information provided by journalistic models is transformed to encyclopedic articles ready for user consumption. Many articles may be subject to different forms of inaccuracies and bias, and within this complex information context of armed conflicts which are geographically far away for most information consumers, DellaVigna et al. (2011) have pointed out that most people lack direct knowledge of the conflicts beyond what they might read in mainstream media. Therefore, information stemming from media which finds itself within Wikipedia articles solidifies particular understandings of the conflict to information consumers. The process of deciding which information stays in the article becomes information warfare, which is considered by Zhukov and Baum (2016) to be a form of reporting bias which may “lead the public to misunderstand the nature of a conflict”.

Public misunderstanding of geo-political armed conflicts has the potential to affect relations between nations, cultures and communities, thereby contributing to social unrest. Zhukov and Baum (2016) have shown through their study of reporting bias in armed conflicts that public response to conflict depends on what people know about it, which in turn is directly influenced by the sources from which information is obtained. Moreover, conflicts which take place on foreign land and militarized zones are difficult to observe and many of its underlying events are under-reported. The ability of Wikipedia to classify real-time information of current events helps it succeed in creating comprehensive encyclopedic knowledge repositories on current armed conflicts despite its challenges. Sources provided by diverse media which addresses armed conflicts populate Wikipedia articles in an attempt to provide reliable information. However, Zhukov and Baum (2016)

note that organizations in charge of providing information on armed conflicts do so under different circumstances and interests. For example, within a conflict such as a civil war, some sources might place disproportionate attention on government actions, while others might focus on rebel violence; their editorial lines might be influenced by commercial or ideological reasons, or they might be subject to government control and censorship. This variation in information laden with reporting bias provides different perspectives from different contexts and interested parties. It is Wikipedia's task to negotiate how that information is classified, organized, described and prioritized in order to build an article of encyclopedic quality from a neutral point of view perspective ready for public consumption as events develop in real-time.

Wikipedia governance attempts to deal with this problem in numerous ways. The challenge however, is to understand Wikipedia's negotiation process in order to provide reliable information taking into account reporting bias and ideological influence in the resulting articles' content, which might be hidden from common view and operate within its community's governing practices, traditions and norms. Due to Wikipedia's popularity as a source of information for citizens, this resulting bias may have the power to legitimize knowledge. For this purpose, a discursive analysis of the way in which conflict is represented in controversial articles about current wars is necessary. While most news consumers lack the skills to detect and deal with reporting bias (Popkin, 1994), social scientists are able to understand the intricacies of inherent biases within text production and knowledge dissemination through the application of qualitative research methodologies. However, Zhukov and Baum (2016) note that scientists apply their research techniques on data about current armed conflicts which is procured by information providers such as news agencies that are present on the field. Their reports, laden with bias as a consequence of their circumstances and intentions populate the datasets which scholars use in order to apply their research and produce relevant conclusions. In Wikipedia, articles are filled with information, sources and discussions over content that can be very useful for the purpose of understanding issues regarding information warfare about armed conflicts. Effective research on the construction of

encyclopedic quality articles on current wars can only be done if biases inherent in article content negotiation are properly understood.

In Wikipedia, content is formed as many articles are generated from a single point of view by a single contributor who is informed by the encyclopedia's policies and guidelines that will be discussed further below. Apart from these guidelines, it is often through a process of discussion, debate, and argument, that Wikipedia contributors ideally and gradually manage an attempt to reach consensus as multiple editors join the article development process. However, some articles undergo contention periods which cause edit wars and content disputes. By looking into these disputes, and into how articles grow and develop, this dissertation hopes to analyze Wikipedia's collaborative practices and traditions which interpret common Wikipedia policies and guidelines in their own manner (Forte, Bruckman, 2005). Studying their "long process of discussion, debate, and argument" (Greenstein, Deveraux, 2017), as well as the structure of governance of Wikipedia, this project is interested in how they gradually attempt to approach a "Neutral Point of View" reached through consensus, how this process creates conflict and how contributors experience it throughout their participation in the editing and development of articles about current wars. Logically, how this 'neutral point of view' sought in an open and collaborative framework such as Wikipedia is a core aspect, which is why the neutral point of view as a concept linked to objectivity and a core public value relevant for journalism and science will be discussed in-depth as a result of the gathered data.

One of the main problematic consequences of reporting bias in armed conflicts is that news consumers tend to listen to the editorial lines that already conform to their established world views (Stroud, 2011). Competing world views, therefore clash within Wikipedia in attempts to battle for the prevalence of particular understandings of armed conflicts, and according to Zhukov and Baum (2016), information seen in news media and consequently, Wikipedia articles, may lead on public opinion as to how a conflict will develop, and push governments into specific types of interventions thought to be necessary to put an end to

them. As Wikipedia has the potential to legitimize knowledge, it may also have the power to direct public opinion towards specific political action. Stroud (2011) has shown that being constantly exposed to arguments from a single perspective is detrimental to communication and compromise, thereby making it more difficult to reach common positions in attempts to stop armed conflicts. As public information influences policy-makers in deciding what sort of intervention is required to stop a conflict, it is necessary to explore how Wikipedia deals with reporting bias on armed conflicts because its prevalence in article content may have the potential to hinder armed conflict resolutions.

Thus, Wikipedians become curators of what information is given visibility within its articles. The encyclopedia project encourages contributors to do so from a position of neutrality. Therefore, Wikipedia attempts to provide clear definitions for the concept of the “Neutral Point of View” (Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View, 2017) (abbreviated as NPoV from this point forth). According to the site, the emphasis of the NPoV within its articles and editing process means that Wikipedians should strive to “describe disputes, but not engage in them”. The focus of the editing should be in the issues themselves and not the debates surrounding them, thereby preventing ideological advocacy. Additionally, Wikipedia attempts to assist in dispute resolution among disagreeing editors by providing a framework that facilitates the search for consensus (Kostakis, 2010; Reagle, 2010; Kriplean et al., 2007). Exploring this framework is the focus of this dissertation. However, conflict resolution, and Wikipedia’s structural involvement in this process is quite complex in practice. As we can see in Matei and Dobrescu (2011), when consensus is reached among editors, or editing conflicts are solved through the involvement of administrators, discursive and social practices as well as ideological biases play a significant role in the process.

In a context where information warfare is rampant, Zhukov and Baum (2016) understand reporting bias as a purposeful action used in order to drive public opinion towards specific political or social action. Different reporting agencies have different incentives in this

regard, and within the context of current armed conflicts, information warfare has the purpose of achieving specific partisan advantages in order to further particular causes. How this information warfare translates from traditional media to the common task of developing an open access real-time encyclopedia is an important gap in knowledge which needs to be addressed. Thus, it is possible that while Wikipedia, as a collaborative project, seeks universal access to knowledge; it may inadvertently contribute to the legitimization of dominant discourses which may lead to the perpetuation of unequal power relations, as more and more nations, organizations and ideological institutions understand that the power to decide which news coverage is featured in the most visited encyclopedia can be an extremely powerful propaganda tool. For this reason, one of the aims of this dissertation is to understand how precisely is content represented through editing and discussion of controversial articles and furthermore, how Wikipedia contributors experience their involvement in this process.

1.1. Research Questions

This dissertation explores Wikipedia as a beacon of contemporary knowledge and an important and influential source for the public by critically analyzing its practices of collaborative knowledge creation in the context of current armed conflicts. Thus, there are two aims in this thesis. First, it will explore **how conflict is represented within the editing and discussion processes of controversial Wikipedia articles about current war**. The focus being on the way in which contributors interact with each other and battle for the prevalence of their content in the talk pages of contentious articles. Second, it will **shed light on how these contributors, called Wikipedians, experience their own involvement in the process**. For both purposes, this thesis will place particular attention

in Wikipedia editing processes, its governance, rules and regulations, its structure and societal relevance.

In order to explore these aims, a set of research questions is proposed which will explore various elements of the article creation process of Wikipedia. Generally, in Critical Discourse studies, language material should not be examined apart from its context. In order to explore the data in this thesis it is therefore necessary to understand Wikipedia, and its potential social impact.

RQ. 1a. What are the characteristics in Wikipedia which shape content and article construction?

RQ. 1b. What is the impact and influence which Wikipedia exerts in society?

In order to explore this, I outline Wikipedia's general structure for the purpose of describing its basic processes, its technology, its governance and the motivations and attributes of its contributors (henceforth referred to as Wikipedians), I describe its understanding as a community with traditions, practices and norms which influence Wikipedia behaviors, I illustrate the concept of conflict among Wikipedians which influences content creation and I discuss the notions of power within Wikipedia and how it shapes, and is in turn shaped by society. Finally, the geo-political context of the chosen

Wikipedia articles for this research is briefly described for the purpose of addressing the relationship between Wikipedia and the global information it intends to produce and share.

Regarding the first aim of exploring **how conflict is represented through editing and discussion of controversial Wikipedia articles about ongoing international conflicts**, a second research question and three subsequent sub-questions are put forward:

RQ. 2. How do Wikipedia editors' talk page discourse on controversial Wikipedia articles covering current armed conflicts look like?

RQ. 2a. Which items related to Wikipedia are discussed during the editing process?

RQ. 2b. What are the processes which Wikipedians use in order to legitimize their content?

RQ. 2c. How is rational discourse represented throughout the content creation process?

This second set of questions focuses on identifying topics of issues and processes which happen during discussions within the talk pages of Wikipedia articles regarding the content editing process. This action requires a qualitative methodology approach which can deal with a large body of textual data and still provide in-depth understandings of the conflicts which happen within.

Finally, in order to address the aim of **exploring the way in which Wikipedians experience their involvement in the discussions regarding controversial Wikipedia**

articles about ongoing armed conflicts, a final research question and three subsequent sub-questions are put forward:

3. How have Wikipedia editors experienced their involvement in controversial Wikipedia articles covering current armed conflicts and how do they assess these experiences?

3a. What is Wikipedia's perceived role in society?

3b. How do Wikipedians interpret their participation in conflicts over content?

3c. What are the concerns Wikipedians have about the knowledge creation process within controversial articles?

For this purpose, semi-structured interviews with Wikipedians who participate in the content creation of controversial articles on armed conflicts are performed with an exploratory focus which helps us identify their particular perceptions on the intricacies and issues regarding the controversial editing process.

In the following section, we will see how it is possible that Wikipedia, an encyclopedia where anyone can edit, be successful. We will discuss its structure, its mechanisms for gate-keeping contributions, who are its contributors and what motivates them to participate, and finally, the way the project is managed and governed.

2. A look into Wikipedia

To deliver a first overview over its framework, the following chapter describes its structure and internal anatomy and introduces the technology on which Wikipedia runs, the organization of the site and its articles, the type of language that it uses and its particularities regarding gate-keeping of information, contributor participation and governance.

2.1. What Wikipedia is Not

The function of Wikipedia was not always clear. In his ‘Early History of Nupedia and Wikipedia’ Sanger (2005), co-founder of Wikipedia together with Jimmy Wales, recounts how at the beginning of the development of the encyclopedia project contributors were often not clear what Wikipedia actually was, and as the project grew and evolved over time, it became surprisingly difficult to describe what Wikipedia precisely was. Commonly, some contributors tended to confuse Wikipedia with a dictionary or use it as a discussion forum or a bulletin board¹. In time, disagreement over these understandings of the nature of Wikipedia gave way to the What Wikipedia is Not policy page (Wikipedia:

¹ This is recounted by Sanger in his Early History of Nupedia and Wikipedia: A Memoir

What Wikipedia is Not, 2017) (see figure 1) that would help users focus on the project at hand— building an open online encyclopedia.

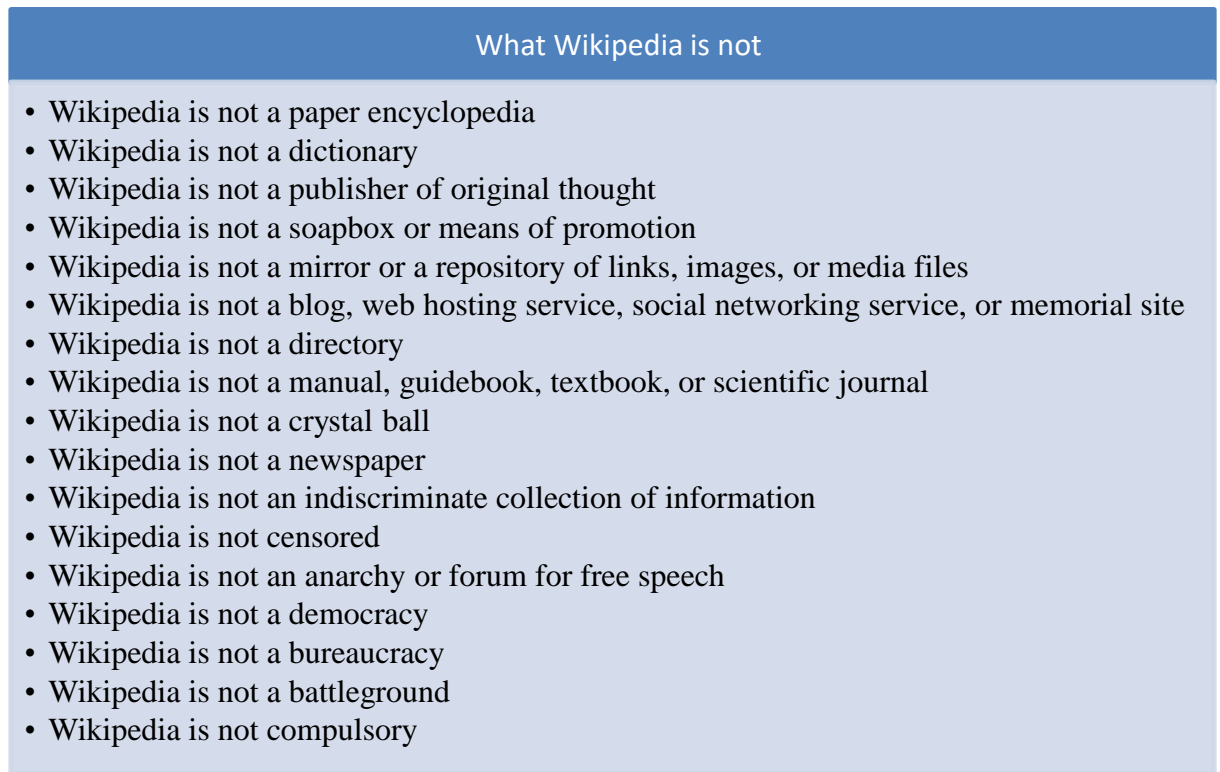


Figure 1: What Wikipedia is Not (Wikipedia: What Wikipedia is Not, 2017)

Therefore, in this chapter, I will start considering what precisely the Wikipedia is.

As we will see in the next chapter, Wikipedia is considered a community and a system of co-production of knowledge. Before we delve in this discussion, its internal operational processes must be described. Understanding how Wikipedia started and how it became popular will show the reader that early decisions, agreements and disagreements by early developers has had a significant impact on the direction in which the project has grown. Wikipedia governs itself, creating and enforcing its own rules ad hoc through discussion and consensus. Therefore, its governance, the particularities and motivations of its contributors, and its sense of community must be described in order to shed light on how

content is dealt with, developed, stored, maintained and disputed. These attributes of Wikipedia will be important in understanding the cultural value that the project produces and how it may help instill collaborative practices and notions of community that works for the greater good of society. On the other hand, the description of these attributes will shed light on the dangers of Wikipedia in helping maintain status quo and unequal power relations by legitimizing partisan knowledge.

2.2. Wiki Technology, Anatomy and Language

Wikipedia takes part of its name from the “wiki technology” (Cunningham, 2002). In Hawaiian language, “wiki” means “fast; quick”, and thus this term was used by Ward Cunningham in 1995 to develop the database format which would eventually be adopted by Wikipedia. Leuf and Cunningham (2001), explain the particularities of a wiki as follows: all users are also considered to be potential contributors, and therefore everyone gets full access to the editing process of a page, as well as the ability to create a new one. Furthermore, establishing relations through pages in the form of hyperlinks is made easy and intuitive, thereby encouraging the creation of an interwoven network of pages related to each other in different ways. The features of this technology promote page design by any willing participants, rather than exclusive development by experts. Thus, potential involvement by all participating users turns editing into an ongoing process. Essentially, a wiki is an open database where any individual may search, browse and create information. Its architecture is designed for non-linear evolutions by providing the tools to create complex, networked text in the form of hyperlinks, and allows space for editors to interact with each other and debate in regards to content and formatting. (Black et al, 2007).

Wikipedia is based on Wikis, but it has a number of different functions within each editing page in order to create communication and participation around its articles and entries (Kriplean et al 2007; Pentzold and Seidenglanz, 2006; Emigh and Herring, 2005; Bryant, Forte, Bruckman 2005; Jemielniak, 2014). These articles are organized into subsets called

namespaces (Wikipedia: Namespace, 2017) which is a reserved word recognized by wiki software that facilitates database organization. The main *namespaces* (highlighted in figure 2) regarding Wikipedia article content are the *article page*, the *talk page* and *the page history*.

The **article page** is the main namespace of the Wikipedia article, which is named after the title of the article i.e. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemeni_Civil_War_(2015-present)*. This is where the current encyclopedic content for the article can be found, and it is main space where Wikipedia users seek their information on topics of their interest. Additionally, every article includes a **talk page** used to discuss about its development. Wikipedians use this namespace in order to discuss about the nature and content of the article, as well as the direction its development should take. Here, Wikipedians solve disputes over content, raise concerns, ask for clarifications or additional information and pose questions related to the development of the article. All of these practices are used in search for consensus over the content displayed in the article page where most Wikipedia readers seek information. If conversation arises, responses from other Wikipedians which identify their creators by username or IP will be shown directly below in thread format. It is here, where Wikipedia discourse takes place, and where part of this dissertation’s analytical work is performed.

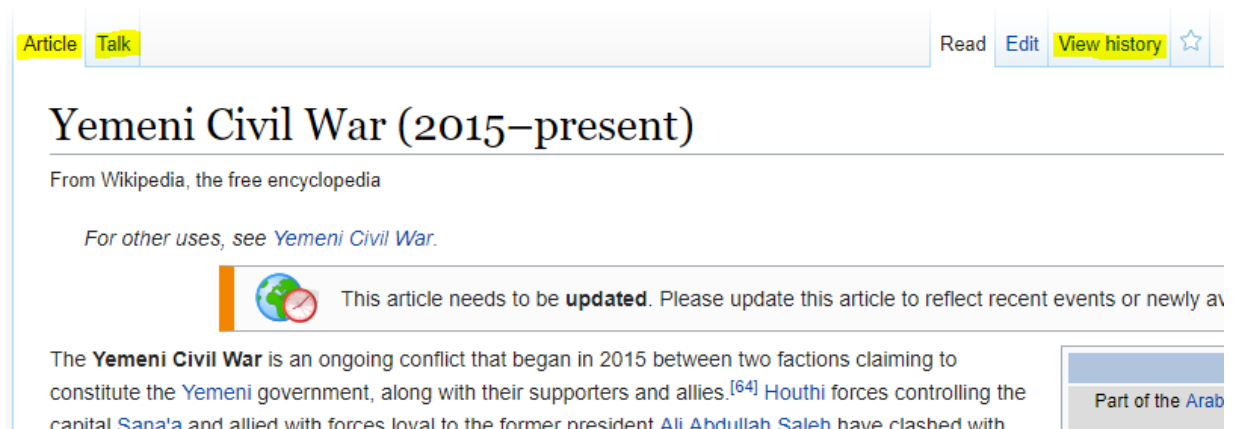


Figure 2: Wikipedia namespaces

Typically, a Wikipedian will open an initial statement in order to start a new argumentation regarding an issue of interest for the development of the article (see methodology chapter

for in-depth discussion). These talk pages, which will often be in the focus of this dissertation are also part of all other Wikipedia pages, such as personal user pages or policy page, and therefore they are a defining feature of the site.

The third important namespace of an article is its **page history**. This is where all versions of the article that have ever been edited since its inception are kept, accompanied by the username of the editing Wikipedian and with the edit dates in chronological order. The *page history* is easily accessible and it has an intuitive use. Each version is conveniently comparable with any other version throughout the history of the article, with the differences being highlighted. Additionally, each version can be reinstated with the click of a button by any contributor, thus efficiently undoing any possible vandalizing edit. Due to the occasional presence of edit wars, users who make changes to the article are asked to write a brief comment as a means of justification. Through this system, these edit comments can often turn into a discussion over the reliability of the information found inside the article.

The language used in Wikipedia attempts to follow formal and standardized styles resembling those utilized in traditional media (Emigh and Herring, 2005; Medelyan et al., 2009). However, the language in discussion pages is more similar to those found on internet forums. This duality of formal language in **article pages** and informal discussion inside **talk pages** promotes the reproduction of traditional print media norms while at the same time maintaining Wikipedian individuality through the informality of discussions within.

2.3. Gate-keeping

One of the main attributes that Wikipedia is known for is its lack of gatekeeping functions, that is, control over what content is allowed on an article and who are allowed to contribute. However, there is some gatekeeping in the form of blocks to user accounts or IP addresses in order to prevent vandalism (Wikipedia: Blocking Policy, 2017) in addition to a Three-Revert-Rule which forbids users that engage in edit warring to “perform more than three reverts on a single page in a period of 24 hours” (Wikipedia: Edit Warring, 2017). Still, there is no overall central control over what is being published (Konieczny, 2009). Thanks to the wiki technology, any user is considered a potential editor with the power to create, contribute or change any articles that they wish. This was one of the key factors that allowed Wikipedia’s massive growth, as it removed many barriers from would-be contributors and still draw a great number of new users into becoming potential Wikipedians who start participating in editing activities on a massive scale.

When questions are raised about the feasibility of such an open system, the proponents of Wiki technology state that knowledge developed within is related to the “bazaar model” (Raymond, 1999). The bazaar model states that “given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow”; this means that if enough Wikipedians and other users of the site are watching the content, eventually all mistakes will be corrected. Wikipedia has a **watch list** function precisely for this purpose, where Wikipedians can easily monitor changes in articles of their interest and can correct any mistakes or revert malicious edit (Wikipedia: Help: Watchlist, 2017). Experienced Wikipedians usually check their **watch list** as their first activity after logging in to the site. (Bryan, Forte, Bruckman, 2005). As wiki technology allows the storage of every version of every article that has been created or edited, Wikipedia becomes protected against simple forms of vandalism. If users with ill-intentions attempt to vandalize an article, their work can easily be undone with the click of a button. This works as a deterrent for would-be vandals, as all their work and effort put into vandalism becomes undone with next to no effort (Konieczny, 2009). Konieczny thus postulates that “rational

editors will prefer to do constructive work” while “rational vandals will move to other easier to vandalize communities”. Generally, the amount of good-intentioned Wikipedians with the will to contribute to the encyclopedia outweighs the number of disruptive editors, ensuring that most simple vandalizations are quickly fixed. It is the purpose of this research then, to look into those deeper, latent, discursive issues that are not so easily identified but which strongly affect the outcomes of Wikipedia articles. In the context of socio-political articles, namely those about ongoing armed conflict, we will see in further chapters how vandalism and disruptive edits and practices take a central role in the development of these Wikipedia articles and which processes Wikipedians use in order to legitimize their content.

2.4. Wikipedians

However, it must not be forgotten that Wikipedia is first and foremost a collective effort for the creation of an open online encyclopedia. Yet, who are these people committed to the project? Where do they come from? What are their motivations to contribute? As seen in Sanger’s memoir (2005), Wikipedia was first put together by a select team of skilled individuals with a clear vision of what an encyclopedia was supposed to be. During Wikipedia’s massive growth, however, a great influx of new members started to contribute to the project, bringing with them their new ideas, contributions or disagreements. Thus, contributors’ importance is reflected in the research about Wikipedia, which seems to be mostly leaning towards contributors and how they create, edit and actively participate in the online community life of the project (Mesgari et al, 2015). These contributors are mainly motivated to participate by values of self-efficiency, self-esteem and egalitarian ideology (Timme Bisgaard Munk, 2009). However, Wikipedia’s original reason to exist – the creation of a free, open, online encyclopedia – tends to show that collaborative motives dominate over individualistic motivation (Prasarnphanich and Wagner, 2009) and where “altruism is one of the most important factors” for administrators (Baytiyeh and Pfaffman, 2010) and regular contributors alike (Zhu, 2008; Yang and Lai, 2010; Nov and Kuk, 2008).

Research such as the ones mentioned above therefore shows that most Wikipedia contributors are thoroughly committed to the improvement of the project for altruistic reasons, and there is little evidence of extrinsic motivation that could determine involvement of external institutions or special interest groups with the exception of the “Wiki-PR” case, which was “a consulting business behind one of the biggest covert editing efforts in Wikipedia’s history” (Owens, 2013). As Wikipedia’s vast and voluntary workforce seems to define it, it is therefore within the structural praxis of this workforce where we will attempt to look for the sort of hidden discourses that affect and shape the knowledge published within Wikipedia articles.

Those Wikipedia users that become active editors and contribute content or assist otherwise in editing are commonly referred to as “Wikipedians”. They are voluntarily creating and organizing content (Prasarnphanich and Wagner, 2009). As of August 06, 2017, there were approximately 120,000 active editors that contributed to the site within the last 30 days, and about 32 million registered user accounts for the English Wikipedia (“Wikipedia: Wikipedians” 2017). A key feature of Wikipedia that differentiates the project from other encyclopedias is that most users who are responsible for the contributions to the site are anonymous (Konieczny, 2009).

Becoming a Wikipedian is easy. There are no pre-requisites for a user to be able to edit an article and anybody can do it with or without registering an account. Forte and Bruckman (2008) define three types of users based on their account status: “unregistered users, registered users and Arbitration Committee members” [see figure 3]. *Unregistered users* may edit the Wikipedia freely. However, anonymous contributions carry much less weight and influence in the content as anonymity is seen with suspicion by the community and other regular editors. *Registered users* can be divided into *regular registered users* - who are the main body of the signed community that hold no special technical power, and *special power users* – who are *registered users* that may hold various technical special

powers such as *administrators*, *bureaucrats*, *checkusers*, *oversights*, *developers* and *stewards*.

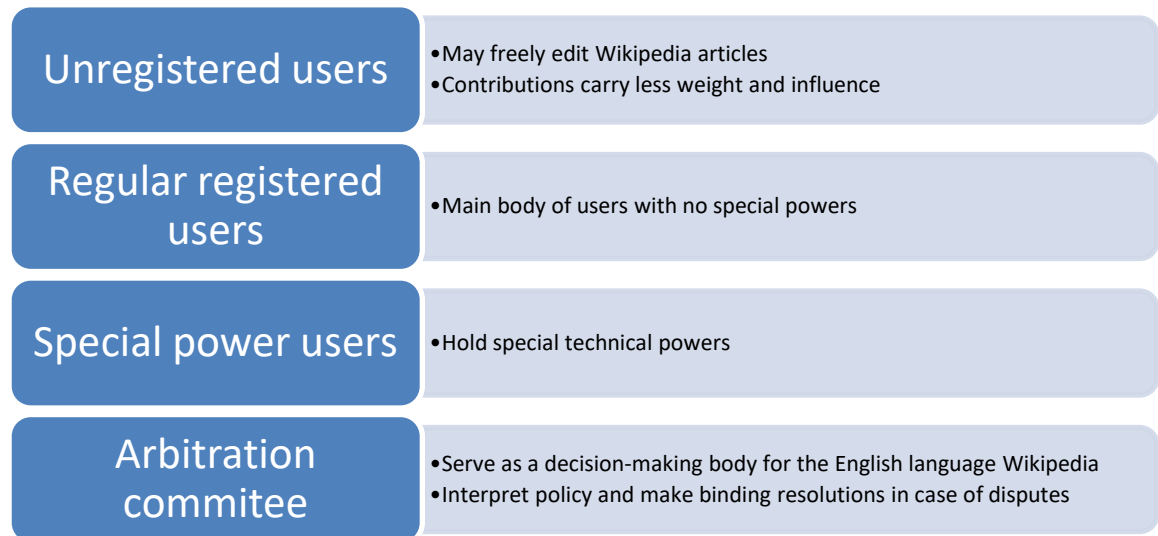


Figure 3: Types of users (Forte and Bruckman, 2008)

Different types of Wikipedia contributors with additional powers might be seen as having extra influence over the outcomes of knowledge production, thereby determining what sort of content might stay and what content will remain disputed. How administrators influence and take care of Wikipedia’s community and the knowledge it produces will be discussed more thoroughly in the section about governance and power relations in Wikipedia. Below, *special power users* (figure 4) will be described in order to understand their technical capabilities and responsibilities towards the project.

Administrators can protect or unprotect pages (“Wikipedia: Administrators”, 2017.), that is temporarily or indefinitely restrict editing privileges within articles in order to prevent vandalism or content disputes (“Wikipedia: Protection policy” n.d.); delete and undelete pages and rename them without restrictions. Konieczny’s 2010 study on Wikipedia governance found that administrators did not have any significant advantage in preventing their content from being disputed thanks to their status. *Bureaucrats* have the “ability to

make administrators, rename users and create other bureaucrats” (“Wikipedia: Bureaucrats”, 2017). Leskovec et al. (2010) found that factors that would influence the voting for admin status had to do more with personal relations among contributors than merit, a practice that could undermine transparency and neutrality in Wikipedia’s governance. *Stewards* are users with the ability to change the access rights of every other Wikipedia user, and they have access to the full wiki interface. They have a responsibility technically implement the consensus of the community and they are elected once or twice a year (“Wikimedia: Stewards”, 2017.). *Oversights* are users authorized by the Arbitration Committee to completely suppress article content from the revision log history for all users, including even administrators. These special content purges can be applied for the purpose of removing non-public personal information, potentially libelous information, copyright infringement, hide blatant attacks and removing vandalism (“Wikipedia: Oversight”, 2017.). *Checkusers* can query Wikimedia servers in order to check IP addresses used by a Wikipedia user accounts, in addition to other technical data stored in the server about said users. There is a very restricted number of *checkusers* and their permissions are granted by the Arbitration Committee after community consultation and vetting (“Wikipedia: Checkuser”, 2017.). *Developers* are the people who write the Wikimedia software and are in charge of maintaining Wikimedia Foundation’s servers (“MediaWiki: Developers”, 2017). Finally, some users are members of the Arbitration Committee. It was established in 2004 for the purpose of formally resolving disputes among Wikipedians, and it acts as a decision-making body for the English Wikipedia in regards to the application of policy. Its users were originally commended to produce binding resolutions for interpersonal disputes through the interpretation of policy (Forte, Bruckman, 2008). Arbitration Committee members can be elected through community

processes by consensus among Wikipedians, or they can be appointed by Jimmy Wales himself.

Special power users	Arbitration committee	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbitration_Committee
	Administrators	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators
	Bureaucrats	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bureaucrats
	Stewards	https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Stewards
	Oversights	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Oversight
	Checkusers	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:CheckUser
	Developers	https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Developers

Figure 4: Special Power users

In conclusion, it is here, where Wikipedia may seem to be more open for some than for others. However, Konieczny (2010), considers that administrators and other types or special users seem to have small real power and that they are more similar to janitors, that is, contributors in charge to keep things clean, rather than leaders with meaningful control over the creation of content.

2.5. Contributor Participation

As Wikipedia is found to be a massive community of users with the common goal of establishing an encyclopedia (Konieczny, 2009), it would be safe to assume the practices and motivations for most contributors do not lie in the accumulation of cultural capital and the creation of partisan information. In the following section, we will see how users gradually begin to contribute and be part of the co-production process that defines Wikipedia.

Bryan, Forte and Bruckman (2005) also categorize Wikipedians based on their degree of participation. **Novice** Wikipedians engage in **peripheral participation** by completing small tasks such as grammar corrections, broken link fixing and other minor activities

which pose little to no risk of potential controversy to the article. **Expert** Wikipedians, on the other hand engage in **full participation** by adding article content and creating new articles. Commonly, aspiring Wikipedians start exploring the possibilities and common practices of the project through peripheral participation, and eventually graduate towards full participation. As seen in Yang and Lai, (2010) and Timme Bisgaard Munk, (2009), for Wikipedians, building an online encyclopedia remains the main goal. However, individual goals realized through their participation in the project, as well as their perception of self within the community may change over time as their experience increases. Initial contributions from novice editors usually come from their own areas of expertise where they feel most comfortable. As they work in correcting minor mistakes about information of their interest, they gradually adopt a caretaker role over a growing number of articles. Throughout this process, users start to adopt Wikipedian culture and begin identifying themselves with the community. They embrace the site's goals and see themselves as caterers and creators of open free access information. As these values sink in through participation, Wikipedians perceive their work to be a contribution to the greater good (Bryan, Forte, Bruckman, 2005; Zhu, 2008). While users, who can already be considered experts, keep improving the quality of individual articles, their focus expands to the improvement of Wikipedia and its community as a whole by interpreting and contributing to policy, helping other prospect users and actively participating in day-to-day Wikipedia governance.

Finally, Bryan, Forte and Bruckman (2005) show that expert members of the community tend to do a voluntary division of labor in order to keep the project productive. As Wikipedians become expert, they adopt different roles on top of their article editing activities. Some use their time checking help page and assisting potential new contributors by answering questions and helping with guidelines. Others dedicate their time towards dispute resolution, serving on the Arbitration Committee and taking care of extended disputes among contributors that the community is not able to solve by itself. Some expert Wikipedians become administrators or arbitrators and obtain special functions such as the ability to remove vandalism from a page's history, the ability to block IPs from editing and

the ability to edit protected pages. These extra responsibilities are not meant to be a privileged position, but achieving this status requires a Wikipedian to be an established and therefore trusted member of the community. In conclusion, many expert Wikipedians still work on the editing off Wikipedia articles but tend to take on additional meta-wiki roles in order to take care of the community by keeping it productive, monitor its activities and help correct its mistakes.

2.6. Wikipedia governance

Wiki technology, a general soft stance on gatekeeping and, as it can be seen in the next subchapter, a thriving and involved community of contributors, have influenced the development of an open access nature in Wikipedia. Naturally, such an environment without strong hierarchical notions will not lack a presence of numerous conflicts about the development of different topics, from the creation of encyclopedic content, to the attributes of its own governance. In the following sub-chapter, this research will review how Wikipedia is organized in order to cope and thrive despite the potential strife and anarchy its own organizational culture might create; how its guiding policies are developed, how they change over time and how they are interpreted and enforced by its contributors.

Wikipedia governance is a dynamic environment which has been adapting to the challenges presented to it throughout its development. As the site's popularity grew together with the population of active Wikipedians, the governance of the project became more and more decentralized over time (Forte and Bruckman, 2008; Forte, Larco and Bruckman, 2009). The general definition of governance refers to the ways in which organizations manage people's behaviors through a system of rules and regulations within a particular place. As Wikipedians contribute to the project through the creation, archiving and dissemination of information, they do so constrained by the social norms generated within the site throughout its historical development, norms which in time became part of

a formal governance within the online encyclopedia. Throughout the years, Wikipedia's cultural capital, that is, its value for society has been on the rise, and consequently, the dangers of its misuse have risen. This has created a need for a properly governed community. Through the analysis of the talk pages of articles about war, where discussion takes place, and semi-structured interviews to its participants, this dissertation will determine what types of such misuse are present within the underbelly of the article creation process within this particular socio-political and contentious context.

As Wikipedia is heavily influenced by the open-source model of collaborative creation, a traditional hierarchical organization was not found to be the preferred form of governance. In any case, such misuse is difficult to pinpoint to any specific external agents or advocacy groups who might find it beneficial to influence Wikipedia through its rules and regulations. Thus, Ostrom (2000) stated that cooperation between members of a community is achieved easier from a natural evolution of social norms, rather than from an imposition of top-down rules. Naturally occurring cooperative behavior encourages cooperative growth over time, while enforced cooperation tends to disappear very quickly. Forte and Bruckman (2008) observed that in Wikipedia, rules and regulations underwent constant refinement from within the community itself, without influence or imposition by external authorities. This created a wide, decentralized distribution of power which disincentivize the possibility of formal authoritarian rule.

As regulatory systems are created ad hoc by and for the community, based on the work of Forte and Bruckman (2008) in their article "Scaling consensus: Increasing decentralization in Wikipedia governance", I overview the roles which Wikipedians take upon themselves within the community and over whom governance is exerted. *Unregistered users* naturally have little to no influence over Wikipedia policy and norms due to their complete anonymity, which does not inspire trust within the community in order to exert significant influence over it. However, unregistered users are a main part of the context over whose behavior rules and regulations are developed and applied. *Registered users* on the other

hand, usually associate themselves into different subgroups which dictate the ways in which they organize and police content. These include *Ideological groups* based on beliefs in how the Wikipedia community should behave. Here, the main dichotomy is found between *Inclusionists*, those who believe that Wikipedia must include all possible information and not exclude diverse points of view; and *Deletionists*, those who believe that strict, more restrictive guidelines should be put in place in order to guarantee quality encyclopedia content. Additionally, there are a number of functional groups, such as for example the Vandal Fighters², the Bot Approval Group³ or the Volunteer Response Team⁴ which manage various meta-wiki tasks which keep the community running. Additionally, there are content related groups based on the editing interest⁵ of Wikipedians, ranging from politics, history, science to sports, technology, famous individuals, etc. Finally, the aforementioned Arbitration Committee, which generally serves as a decision-making body for the English Wikipedia site wields considerable influence in the community. Arbitration committees are independent for other language Wikipedias and currently exist for the French, German and Polish Wikipedia (Wikipedia: Arbitration Committee, 2016). Their Arbitrators do not possess any special authority or formal power which enables them to create policy (Leskovec, Huttenlocher, Kleinberg, 2010; Goldspink, 2009). However, their actions play a significant role in influencing both content and policy. The role of its founder Jimmy Wales' involvement in Wikipedia has also changed over time. At the inception of the project, he was much more involved in the daily business of the site; however, his current involvement in English Wikipedia is mostly limited to high level guidance and policy discussions (Forte and Bruckman 2008).

The architecture of Wikipedia's governance system is described by some researchers (Kriplean et al. 2007; Butler, Joyce and Pike, 2008) to be oriented by *policies, guidelines*

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Henna/VF>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Bot_Approvals_Group

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Volunteer_Response_Team

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Contents/Lists>

and essays. These articles are built the same way as any other Wikipedia page, and in theory, in the same way as the rest of Wikipedia, any user can edit them. Despite the openness in the editing process of policy pages, Konieczny (2009) found in his analysis of the Wikipedia verifiability policy that it is extremely difficult to gain unilateral control over content in community policies. In any case, Wikipedia policies are at the top of the hierarchical order. They are clearly defined, have few usable exceptions and are tightly defended against changes. Guidelines on the other hand are less official than policies, yet violation can still carry consequences for Wikipedians. They are less clearly defined however, carry more usable exceptions and are more open for debate and interpretation. Finally, policies and guidelines can start as essays which express the concerns and opinions of Wikipedians about the development and management of the Wikipedia community and its internal issues. If these essays get enough traction and support from fellow Wikipedians, they can eventually graduate to become guidelines and policies. While, Goldspink (2010) determined that rules and regulations play only a small role in regulating user behavior, text analysis within the talk pages of contentions articles in this dissertation has shown that Wikipedians often use references to policies in order to legitimize their edits and point of views. Much like professional lawyers, veteran Wikipedians can use their knowledge of Wikipedia governance in order to quickly balance content disputes in their favor by appropriately invoking Wikipedia law.

As any editors have the right to change any Wikipedia articles, wiki policy becomes flexible, changes over time, and traditionally tends to represent practices by the community, rather than guide them towards a specific direction from above. Bruckman and Forte (2009, p38) stated that it might seem from the outside that anyone could barge in and modify policy, however, establishing and adjusting policy is a “complex social negotiation that often takes place across many communication channels and in which power, authority and reputation play decisive roles”. Thus, Kittur et al. (2007) and Forte and Bruckman (2008) found that only a part of governance activity happens on the Wikipedia site. Often important decisions will be discussed within public or even private chat rooms, mailing lists and personal off-wiki communication in the form of direct email

messages between Wikipedians, a practice which contradicts Wikipedia's idea of transparency.

3. Wikipedia Analysis

3.1. Wikipedia as a community

Moving on from describing Wikipedia's technical and governance framework to its conceptual core, it becomes quickly apparent that its aspect of "community" is important as one of the characteristics which shape content and article construction (RQ1a). Throughout the years, Wikipedia has developed into a vast network of social relations comprised of its participants which together form a sort of community. This aspect – its 'community' – is important to discuss for its mode of co-production and an understanding of its discourse as it can be found for example on its talk-pages. Throughout its development, Wikipedia has transcended its own definition of merely being an online source of information or an online encyclopedia. As one of the aims of this research is to analyze Wikipedia in terms of the impact and influence which the site exerts on society, we should attempt to understand this aspect that places it beyond definitions of "online encyclopedia" or "information tool" (RQ1b).

Early academic papers that have discussed the site already identify it as a "community" (for example Cifolilli, 2003). Furthermore, co-founder Larry Sanger himself (2005) saw the Wikipedia as a community of editors which were developing together the first basics of Wikipedia policies, dating back to the site's early inception in 2001. Subsequently it has been understood as such by numerous scholars throughout its development and growth (Lin, 2006; Otto & Simon, 2008; Zhang & Kramarae, 2008; McGrady, 2009; Konieczny, 2009; Antin & Cheshire, 2010; Pentzold, 2011).

On the other hand, many different platforms have tried to use the term "community" for marketing purposes in order to take advantage of the positive connotations that the term brings (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003) without too much concern into what exactly was happening within the sites. For example, Burgess and Green (2009) see YouTube as

something far from a single collective. It is instead a platform composed of different subsets of people with their own practices and goals which may greatly differ from one another. While Wikipedian editors might have different reasons for participating on the site, there is a clear common goal which represents Wikipedia as a whole – the creation of a free open-access encyclopedia. Thus, Baym (2010) concludes that the participants on an online platform do not necessarily form a community within, and users of said platforms may very well form very different groups with different sets of practices and goals.

In an attempt to discern whether Wikipedia is a community, Konieczny (2009) considers Ferdinand Tönnies' (1998) classical definition where a community is understood as a group of people brought together by shared traditions, beliefs and common goals, and who operate in regards to the interests of the group rather than the individual. As Tönnies' definition still remains open to interpretation to become useful, definitions for community applied to online context must be updated. Here, Baym (2010) puts forward five qualities which can be found in online groups as well as in classical definitions of communities. These are the sense of space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities and interpersonal relationships. One of the aims of this dissertation is to understand how Wikipedians experience their involvement in the discussion regarding controversial Wikipedia articles about ongoing armed conflicts. The aforementioned qualities of a community have an impact in the way in which its members understand their involvement in the project. At this point, through theoretical assumptions based on the previous literature review, and Wikipedia's own understanding of itself seen in many of its guideline pages, I will attempt to determine whether these qualities are present for Wikipedia and Wikipedians in general. During the analysis of the semi-structured interviews in a later chapter, I will proceed to assess Wikipedians' experience in the involvement of the particular context of ongoing armed conflicts.

3.1.1. Space

It is commonly argued that geography, that is, a shared physical space for the participants, is a necessary feature of every community, and therefore online groups cannot be included in this definition. However, due to the asynchronous nature of online space, there is no need for online groups to be geographically bound. Furthermore, participants often think of online platforms as shared places. Baym (2010) considers space as a metaphor and how it is appropriately applied in the term “cyberspace”; e.g. online environments such as the worlds created in massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs) which function as virtual spaces for individuals to play, interact and socialize; or textual groups, such as forums, chat rooms and bulletin boards which can metaphorically be thought of as spaces.

Wikipedia is not just a set glossary of information but a dynamic space in which contributors and users alike may virtually be in order to share their expertise, discuss policies, create and participate in diverse projects and help with diverse tasks of maintenance of the encyclopedia (“Wikipedia: Community portal”, 2016). Wikipedia articles themselves might also become gathering hubs if they grow large enough to attract a significant number of editors who are willing to participate in its development. Furthermore, Wikipedians - as active members of the Wikipedia community like to call themselves – (“Wikipedia: Wikipedians”, 2016) commonly organize meet-ups, conferences, symposiums and general gatherings in order to foster collaboration, commitment, socialization and friendship among its members (“Wikipedia: Meetup”, 2016).

3.1.2. Practice

Community is also understood through the common and unconscious practices and behaviors that individuals within a group share (Dundes, 1977). Baym (2010), in her work

comparing online and traditional communities, understands language to be the most important aspect through which groups associate in the digital environment, thereby creating “speech communities” which according to Philipsen (1992) share a particular form of language use which represents and reinforces the cultural ideology under which they are constructed. The concept of “speech communities” therefore becomes particularly useful for the study of online groups.

We can specifically observe in the case of Wikipedia how its community uses a common language that includes its own logic and connotations which are common to its participants’ understandings. Throughout their discussions one can observe how insider lingo is used, including acronyms, vocabulary words, genres, styles and forms of play. Wikipedia itself has compiled a glossary of its own particular terminology commonly attributed to its contributors (Wikipedia: Glossary, 2017). As shared practices develop within the Wikipedia community, norms for proper use of communication are established, and Wikipedians themselves begin participating unconsciously in Wikipedia specific modes of communication as they compose their messages. Through Pentzold’s (2011) grounded theory analysis of online conversations between Wikipedia editors and how their self-understanding of community is constructed, we can see that becoming a group insider involves a process of socialization to common norms and values that will guide communication without those specific norms having to be considered.

Common practices are furthermore displayed, negotiated, reinforced and taught through the shared behaviors of its members. In Online Communities, common practices are typically enshrined through Frequently Asked Questions repositories (FAQs). Wikipedia’s ad-hoc form of governance has developed its own sets of guidelines based on its users’ behaviors since the very beginning of its development (Kriplean et al, 2007; Konieczny, 2009, 2010; Goldspink, 2010; Roth, 2007; Farrell & Schwartzberg, 2008, Forte & Bruckman, 2009; Kostakis, 2010), and the development of repositories outlying norms and guidelines that dictate proper behavior (such as the “What Wikipedia is not” article) is a

common practice. After having discussed shared space and practices, we will now look into shared resources, support and interpersonal relationships among community members.

3.1.3. Shared resources and support

Baym uses Wellman's (1988) definition of communities as "composed of broadly base relationships in which each community member felt securely able to obtain a wide variety of help". Furthermore, according to Baym (2010), when the term "community" is used in a digital context, it is often implied that resources are exchanged collaboratively in an effort to improve the group. Cutrona and Russell (1990) see several overlapping kinds of social support: *social integration*, *emotional support*, *esteem support*, *informational support*, *tangible aid* and *feeling that they are needed*.

Thus, according to Cutrona and Russell (1990, p322), *Social integration* refers to "the desire to organize around common interests for social and recreational purposes". *Emotional support* represents "the ability to turn to others for comfort and security during times of stress, leading the person to feel that he or she is cared for by others". *Esteem support* bolsters "a person's sense of competence or self-esteem" through the provision of "individual positive feedback on his or her skills and abilities or expressing a belief that the person is capable". *Informational support* offers "advice or guidance concerning possible solutions to a problem". *Tangible aid* is a support with money, time, lodging or other services and although it is less common in online groups than other forms of support, it does occur regularly. The final form of support is the "*feeling that they are needed*". Helping others may provide a sense of efficacy, social status and prestige, and may lead to receiving support should the need arise.

In order to fit Wikipedia, these aspects have to be considered in a less strict manner. Studies on contributor motivation for joining and being an active part of the community show a prevalence of intrinsic motivations which could be understood as a resource for emotional

and esteem support. Timme Bisgaard Munk (2009) sees the main Wikipedian motivations as self-efficiency, self-esteem and egalitarian ideology. Additionally, altruism is a very important component of the Wikipedia community, where its members are categorized by donating their time towards the common good through their individual efforts and thereby providing support towards their community and society as a whole while maintaining intrinsic motivation (Zhu, 2008; Nov, Kuk, 2008). This may indicate that despite possible imbalances in content production, Wikipedia as a community will generally attempt to act in good faith with the goal of providing society with free open access knowledge.

Generally, Wikipedians are seen as a community whose goal is to provide support, “largely driven by motivations to learn and create” (Baytiyeh & Pfaffman, 2010) which can be categorized in the *informational* type of social support. The sense of belonging in the form of *social integration* is represented by contributors’ collaborative rather than individualistic motivations (Prasarnphanich & Wagner, 2009; Ha & Kim, 2009). Finally, the *feeling that they are needed* is represented through Wikipedia’s incentive system where contributors recognize each other in the form of little tokens of gratitude called barnstars⁶. Additionally, while receiving individual credit for an article is difficult in a massive collaboration environment, Wikipedians often claim ownership of the articles on the grounds of their contributions (Forte & Bruckman, 2005).

3.1.4. Shared identities

In general, Wikipedia is not the sort of community which individuals seek in order to obtain support. Rather it is a community based on individuals’ common desire of contribution towards a shared goal. This means that there is a shared sense of who “we” are that is preexisting. Groups develop names for themselves, such as “Wikipedians” – through which they develop a “sense of themselves, a social identity of who they are that

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Barnstars>

is shared amongst them and that contributes to the feeling of community” (Tajfel & Turner as cited in Baym, 2010, p127). Individuals within the community affiliate themselves therefore towards different philosophical currents within the site, such as the earlier mentioned *inclusionists* – proponents of broad retention of content- and *deletionists* – proponents of selective coverage of content, and act according to their principles in maintaining and contributing to the ongoing development of the Wikipedia. Furthermore, users adopt different roles within the site and take upon themselves the development of different kinds of tasks such as vandalism control, formatting, conflict resolutions etc (Forte & Bruckman, 2008).

3.1.5. Interpersonal relationships

Groups formed online usually provide the spaces necessary for establishing relationships among individuals. In Wikipedia, members organize meet-ups, use IRC channels and external forums in order to talk to and relate to each other. On the other hand, said interpersonal relationships play a smaller role for the functioning and development of the community. These relationships might be valuable to their participants, but their overall impact on the community as a whole is reduced (Baym, 2007).

In conclusion, and despite common the criticism of online communities (based on the shift away from space, reduction of physical bonds and easy detachment from the group), its members do consider themselves as part of a community with common goals and values. Self-awareness and collective identity are for establishing and participating in a community, and indeed, according to different studies (Rafaeli, Hayat & Arier, 2005; Pentzold, 2011; Kriplean et al 2007; Reagle, 2010; Roth 2007), many Wikipedia contributors do define themselves as Wikipedians and members of the Wikipedia community. This seems to fit with Tönnies’ definition according to Konieczny (2009): Wikipedians form a specific group, they act according to their own practices, traditions and norms developed through time, and they are governed by them; and thus, they have

developed their own culture. Furthermore, they participate in the project for reasons beyond their own self-interest, and strive towards a common goal shared by all its members, that is, building an encyclopedia. This aspect, that it is not based on individual interests but on building an encyclopedia, is important when it comes to Wikipedia's balance and its neutral point of view as its neutrality can be seen as a social value. The Wikipedia community is committed to an idea: co-producing and providing free access to encyclopedic knowledge, an idea that will in theory work in favor of symmetric power relations that can help the ideal pursuit of neutral knowledge, and therefore positively impact our society (RQ1b). However, Wikipedia is characterized by constant content disputes, as community members constantly vie for the prevalence of their content based on different understandings of ideas. To contextualize this, the next sub-chapters will discuss the aspect of conflict and power in the light of Wikipedia.

3.2. Conflict in Wikipedia

In the following sub-chapter, this dissertation will discuss the ways in which Wikipedia creates content, how controversy of information is generated and how in turn, conflicts over content are resolved (RQ1a).

3.2.1. Content creation

Regarding online communities such as Wikipedia, there has also been considerable research that has delved into how and why online co-production works (Bagozzi, Dholakia, 2006; Butler et al 2002; Dholakia, 2004; Roberts et al, 2006; Wasko, Faraj 2005), particularly for Wikipedia (Forte, Bruckman, 2005; Nov, 2007; Rafaeli et al, 2005). The

following paragraphs will present a discussion as to how and why Wikipedia thrives as a system of co-production of knowledge (RQ1a).

Tensions arising from a desired change of content and its protection by individual or groups of contributors are understood as the moving block of the Wikipedia content creation process. There are different theories on how online communities deal with *content change-retain tensions*. Bryant et al (2005), Kittur and Kraut (2010) and Majchrzak (2013) have documented them for the Wikipedia community. While these tensions are partly influenced by formal structures and procedures, i.e. the Arbitration Committee, or the Three-Revert-Rule policy in Wikipedia, Faraj et al (2011) propose that for a co-productive community to thrive, members have to behave *generatively* (co-creatively) as a response to each particular tension stemming from the aforementioned desires of Wikipedians to change or retain content. Thus, they understand *generative responses* as practices by individual members of the community in response to tensions regarding content that promote discussion and engagement with different perspectives which lead to the creation of new knowledge.

Response patterns within Wikipedia are essential. Early conflict resolutions over content seem to shape the way in which Wikipedia articles are further developed, given that new editors tend to reproduce the practices laid out by early contributors (Emigh, Herring, 2006). Indeed, finding a balance between the desire to change and the desire to retain content is found to be an important process for the healthy development of online communities such as Linux (Lee, Cole, 2003), Wikipedia itself (Kittur, Kraut, 2010) as well as in more traditional organizations (March, 1991). Using grounded theory, researchers looking at Wikipedia have turned to looking at the response patterns that contributors produce when dealing with content disputes. The *response patterns* theory of Kane et al. (2014) focuses on how the Wikipedia community handles the *content change-retain tension* between keeping created knowledge or changing it based on new perspectives, events and developments. These tensions are an important part of this

dissertation, as through text analysis of the talk pages of Wikipedia articles about ongoing armed conflicts, I will look at the discussions deriving from these tensions in which Wikipedians participate, the processes they use in order to legitimize their content (RQ2b), and analyze the rational discourse through which these interactions take place (RQ2c)

Content creation in Wikipedia is heavily influenced by Wikipedia's central pillar, the *Neutral Point of View*. Even if the concept is defined within the policy itself, it is especially fragile in online communities, potentially even more so in controversial contentious articles about armed conflicts, where the struggle for cultural capital in the form of prevalence of content is rampant and is never easy for individuals to agree on how it is to be implemented. There is a dichotomy within co-production communities. On one hand we find the importance of early leaders who influence and establish organizational structures (O'Mahony, Ferraro, 2007), governing rules (Butler et al 2008) and methods that ensure a common direction within co-production (Lee, Cole, 2003). On the other hand there is the understanding that co-production communities become dynamic when new contributors constantly bring new perspectives, thereby promoting less pre-defined processes within its development (Faraj et al, 2011; Butler, 2001; Kane, 2011), Wikipedia has the power to provide prime-time information on current, important, socio-political events without gatekeeping or thorough study and analysis. It is therefore crucial to determine what sort of discursive practices affect and are in turn affected by early editor influence that could set a pre-determined direction for the development of contentious article – which can be seen as a form of *discursive bias* and might promote structural accumulation of cultural capital in the form of asymmetrical power relations; or whether a constant influx of new contributors and perspectives and their responses create a dynamic ever-evolving flow of information – which can be considered as a form of *balance*, and

systematic protection against unequal power within the development of Wikipedia articles, thereby representing Wikipedia's Neutrality in knowledge ideal.

Kane et al (2014) in their work "Emergent Life Cycle: The Tension Between Knowledge Change and Knowledge Retention in Open Online Coproduction Communities" used grounded theory on Wikipedia's articles on autism⁷ in order to establish how online coproduction communities handle the tensions produced by the desire to change or maintain article content. They found three key features useful for the methodological approach of this dissertation. First, they found three different behavior patterns based on their production focus and three behavior patterns based on the way in which they maintain co-production of content (p3027). This means that interactions among contributors produce different outcomes in the content based on the way in which these interactions occur. Second, they found that these patterns are distributed heterogeneously over the knowledge creation process, meaning that different patterns manifest themselves at different times during the production process and that different contributors engage in them throughout different development stages. This is a very important feature for the sake of this research as it has the potential to shed light on how Wikipedians experience their involvement within the editing processes (aim 2) in current socio-political articles about armed conflict and how they perceive the discursive practices relative to the creation of knowledge in a controversial environment. Third, contributors do not tend to shift their

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism>

used patterns and thus they leave and join the co-production process when their preferred particular pattern can be applied.

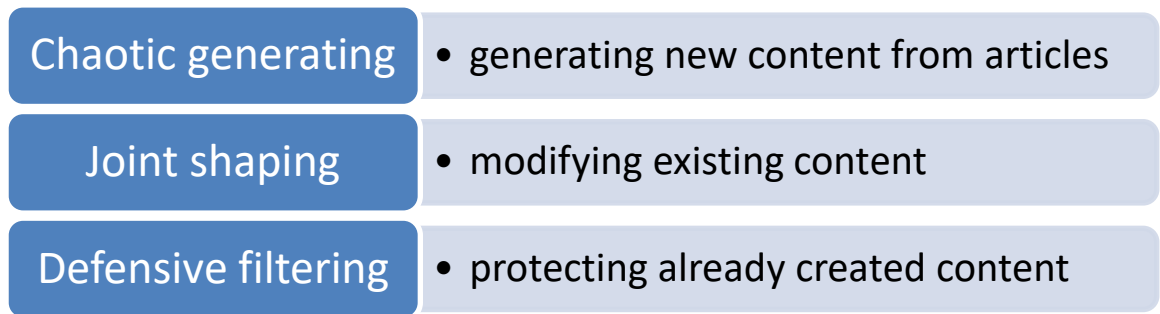


Figure 5: Response Patterns (Kane et al. 2014)

With the use of grounded theory on observed Wikipedia contributor behaviors, Kane et al (2014) have determined three types of *generative response patterns* (figure 5) perpetuated by three contributor roles (figure 6). Contributor roles are divided between *content changers*, users who make changes in existent content; *content retainers*, those who seek to prevent changes in favor of the status quo; and *deliberation facilitators*, users who seek to promote compromises in order to solve the *change-retain tension*. The first *response pattern* is the *chaotic generating pattern*, where contributions focus on creating new content for the articles. This often consists of various parallel attempts at creating new knowledge for the encyclopedia. Change-retain tensions arising from this pattern focus on the accuracy of added content. Second is the *joint-shaping pattern*, where contributions focus on changing existing content in order to improve access, readability and writing style. Change-retain tensions in this pattern arise over applications of Wikipedia guidelines and policies (such as the NPoV) which dictate how content should be put forward in the articles. The third is the *defensive filtering pattern*, where contributions focus on defending existing content previously created by the community by adding small changes

which reflect the evolution of the article topic. Change-retain tensions in this pattern arise over whether new content provides added value to already existing information.

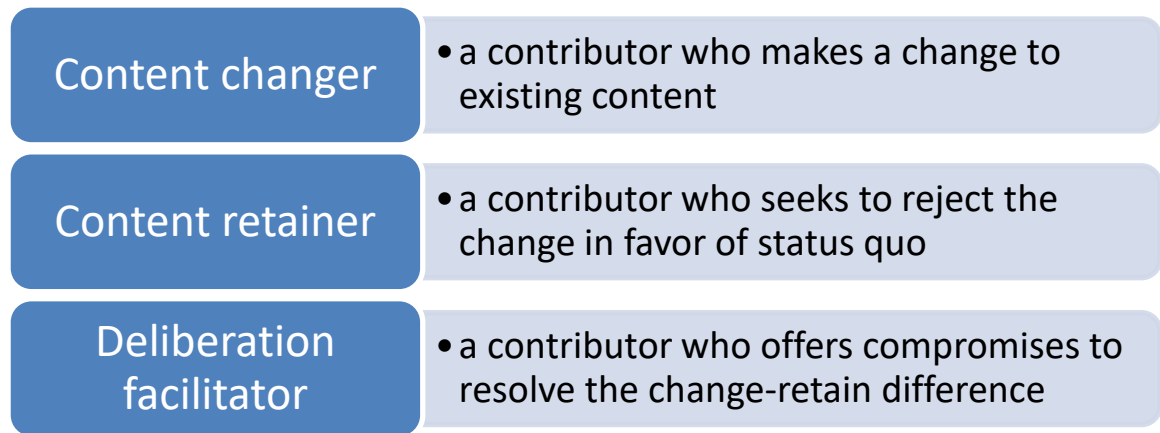


Figure 6: contributor roles (Kane et al. 2014)

A critical discourse analysis of the chosen Wikipedia articles about armed conflict can help shed light on contributor practices in dealing with editing and discussion over contentious ideology-shaping content. It is worth to note that while it is natural to participate primarily in content retention through defensive filtering in standard high-quality developed encyclopedia articles, if a similar practices frequently occur in controversial, on-going, current socio-political articles it would potentially show a high degree of early and imbalanced influence on important ideology-shaping knowledge artifacts, thereby perpetuating hegemonic relations of power. On the other hand, a critical discourse analysis over the structure of communication involving article information generation and shaping can potentially unravel latent discursive practices relative to normalization and

legitimization of knowledge and how power plays or does not play a role in their development.

3.2.2. *Controversy*

As we have seen in the previous section, content creation in Wikipedia is dependent necessarily on generative response patterns of the tension resulting from attempting to generate new content or keeping previously written information. It is natural then that these discussions often result in controversy, as content disputes have the potential to escalate and create an unfavorable collaborative environment. There are several ways in which a correlation between the content of a Wikipedia page and **controversy** can be established. Kittur et al. (2007) and Vuong et al. (2008) have measured the number of times in which the “controversial” (Wikipedia, Template: Controversial, 2017) tag has been applied during the history of an article; Kittur et al. compare this measure with the number of reverts and the number of revisions, while Vuong et al. compare the tag counts with the number of deleted words between users together with the application of the “Mutual Reinforcement Principle” (Zhu, 2002) in order to obtain a controversiality measure. Additionally, Sumi et al. (2011) establish a controversiality measure based on the number of edits, reverts, mutual reverts, talk page length. In any case, Yasseri et al. (2012) state that a simple and direct way of measuring controversiality can be achieved by determining the length of the article talk page, bearing in mind that the talk pages were invented precisely for this purpose. However, it seems that this use of the talk page is particular to the English Wikipedia, as discussions and conflict resolutions tend to occur differently in other language Wikipedias. As this dissertation will deal exclusively with controversial articles, for the purpose of this research, the measure of controversiality represented by the length of the talk page is appropriate given that the methodology of this research is based on critical discourse analysis of a textual corpus and semi structured interviews, and (as

we will see in the methodology chapter) the amount of researched articles is manageable manually.

Based on the aforementioned controversiality measure, Yasseri et al. (2012) identify three categories in an article's **consensus stage** (figure 7): a) **consensus**, which is the most common scenario and it is categorized by the growth of the article with increasing acceleration where after a period of contention is passed, the rate of article growth is decreased and consensus is established. It is possible that an article may become so well polished that it becomes hard to dispute them. b) **Temporary consensus**, where contention and consensus periods become cyclical. After the first cycle of conflict and the following peace, internal causes, such as the arrival of a new cohort of contributors to the article, or external causes, such as development in the topic, may initiate another contentious period;

and c) **never ending wars**, where no permanent or even temporary consensus is ever achieved, indicating highly controversial topics.

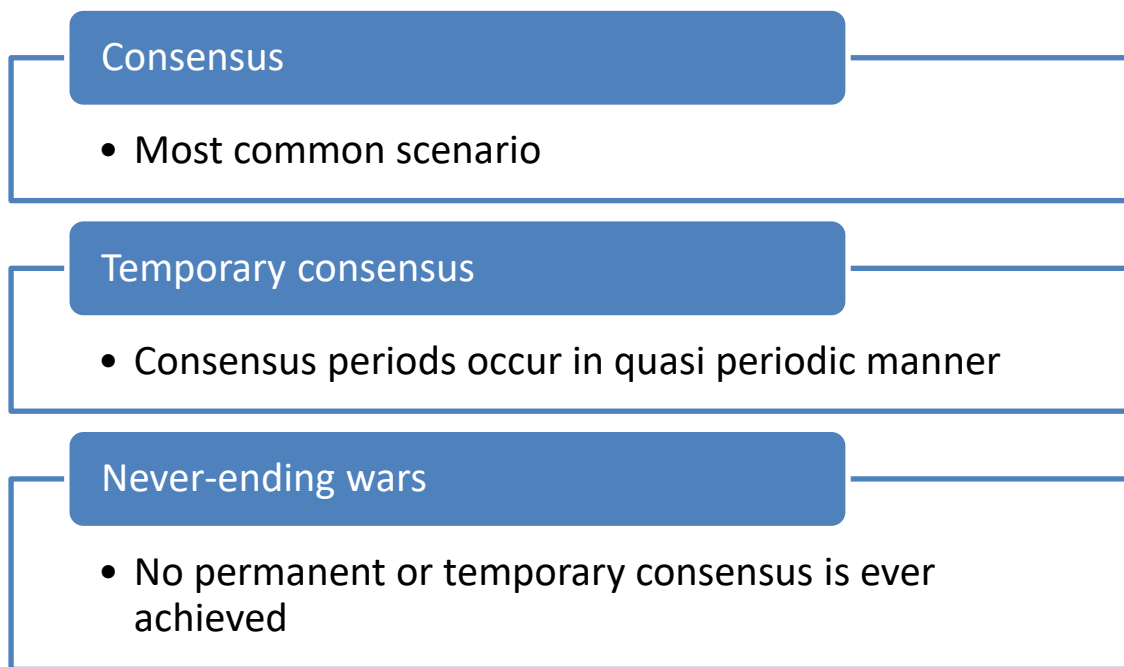


Figure 7: Consensus Stage (Yasseri et al. 2012)

A controversial article that has already arrived to a stage of consensus can show us valuable information on how its inner conflicts have been solved and show us the resulting values, traditions, and norms that have been henceforth guiding its development further. However, in an article of socio-political interest, with controversial qualities, a possible stage of consensus or temporary consensus requires longer periods of time for conflicts to arise and be relatively stabilized over time. In these cases, the knowledge gap between what is currently happening and when academic research or history books are written and published is reduced, as many issues under scrutiny become thoroughly studied, the perception of contributors on the topic varies when many conflicts are scrutinized retrospectively. If Wikipedia articles can be understood as current representations of journalistic or encyclopedic models of understanding in controversial issues threaded with its underlying discourses, this research must look at articles about conflicts in an early

developmental stage which are ongoing and which have not yet reached any stable consensus period, where media priming⁸ (Roskos-Weoldsen, 2002) may still be rampant.

In the next section, this dissertation will discuss how contributors deal with the conflict and disputes arising from controversy.

3.2.3. *Conflict resolutions*

As disputes over content unfold, the members of the Wikipedia community often exert power and influence in order to prevent further discussion with the goals of protecting content due to interests of personal, community, or partisan nature. Jemielniak (2014, p.59) noted that “in spite of the vast majority of literature saying otherwise, Wikipedia cannot be described as solely collaboration driven; it is also dissent driven” and “conflict is possibly the most common form of interaction that people take part on Wikipedia”.

Thus, the “opposite” of a *generative response* in this context as seen in the previous section 3.2.1., would be an action taken to end discussion through persistence, ambiguous agreement, and flat or formal community authority, thereby harming additional cooperation. These actions have been theorized by Kriplean et al. (2007) in the form of contributor power plays, and Matei and Dobrescu in their work “Settling Conflict through Ambiguity” (2011).

Stvilia et al. (2005) found that a significant portion of issues under discussion within Wikipedia talk pages are related to definitions and meanings of words and expressions. These include subjective meanings of nouns, wording, choices of style, semantics and mistakes or misinterpretations. Elliot and Scacchi (2003) postulate on their part that an open-source collaborative project does not exist without conflict, as it plays an important

⁸ Influence of media content on people’s thoughts, beliefs, judgements and behavior.

role in the negotiation of rules and established processes by the community. Thus, Matei and Dobrescu (2011) regard social processes within Wikipedia to be conflict-ridden, and they see the encyclopedia's rules and regulations to be under constant dispute and filled with ambiguity. Matei (2005) understood conflict to be a structural characteristic of Wikipedia due to its community's emphasis on interpretations of meaning. As mentioned earlier by Forte and Bruckman (2008), Wikipedia policy responds to practices performed by Wikipedians in their attempts to contribute to the encyclopedia, instead of guiding them from above. Interviews to Arbitration Committee members performed by them showed that policies can never be considered the final word on any given issue. Instead, interpretation by participants in the discussion plays a major role in conflict resolution, and it can vary according to different understandings of individual Wikipedians. For this reason, Matei and Dobrescu (2011) see Wikipedia to be embedded in conflict. Knowledge creation practices by its members influence rule making, and not vice-versa, and thus the resulting policies and their implementations become quite ambiguous.

As mentioned before, an issue that demands attention in determining how conflict is represented through editing and discussion of controversial Wikipedia articles about on-going armed conflicts is how content which is generated from multiple points of view is dealt with by an organization that is not structured hierarchically. How facts are chosen and defined, how they are evaluated and how meaning is assigned to them. Berger and Luckman (1980) stated that claims of objectivity are problematic because individual, institutional and social trends influence knowledge production. Matei and Dobrescu (2011) analyze therefore whether Wikipedia's own claims of neutrality and objectivity regulated in the NPoV policy are followed as intended in the day-to-day contributions of Wikipedians. In order to shed light on this issue, Matei and Dobrescu focused on conflict

within content disputes and what according to them is one of the key strategies used to minimize it: ambiguity.

Ambiguity is commonly defined as the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; inexactness. It allows Wikipedians to agree to disagree. In theory, Wikipedians abide by the site's rules and regulations, and operate on the same terminology during their contributions to discussions. However, Wikipedians ultimately interpret the meanings of concepts and issues discussed under their own perspective. Matei and Dobrescu (2011) see the Wikipedia as a place that unwillingly promotes open interpretations of rules and opinions, a factor which influences the NPoV to be subjected to constant re-interpretations during periods of conflict. At the same time, the authors propose that it is precisely the concept of ambiguity which allows co-creation of knowledge to thrive. Wikipedia becomes a successful project as it begins to solve its conflicts over content through systemic use of ambiguity. This is found to be one of the main discourse topics within Wikipedia content contention processes, and a critical discourse analysis will be able to see how knowledge creation disputes within current and ongoing armed conflicts can achieve stability, or whether this ambiguity is used in order to pursue partisan objectives.

In their research, the authors judge the NPoV policy to be an unrealistic ideal. The interpretation of the site's most significant policy is always subjective, and rather than explicitly dictate its application to the knowledge creation process, it is constantly re-interpreted by the members of the community. Matei and Dobrescu reach the conclusion that the NPoV policy promotes moral relativism. Through the analysis of the NPoV talk page they determine that conversations within have no clear finality and are found to be in a permanent state of ambiguity. Throughout these discussions, requests for clarification of the policy keep appearing, but the resulting debates end up reinforcing an ambiguous status quo. Matei and Dobrescu conclude that this happens not because the NPoV article is unclear itself, but because the epistemological and philosophical nature of neutrality are

continuously contested, consequently rendering the NPoV policy to be strictly unenforceable.

While Konieczny (2009) saw Wikipedian editors and administrators as relatively powerless in influencing policy, and therefore Wikipedia content as a whole, Matei and Dobrescu found that any consensus can only be achieved by what Kriplean et al. (2007) denominate as **power plays**. Specific individual Wikipedians twist and adapt Wikipedia rules and regulations to fit their own needs in defending their approved content. This creates a dynamic of politics, power struggles and strategic thinking on behalf of Wikipedians who are in permanent disputes over content with each other. Power plays allow Wikipedians to define truth and neutrality according to their own terms, rather than by an ideal intellectual community consensus.

Matei and Dobrescu conclude that the governance exerted by the NPoV policy is not represented by the community's egalitarian effort in the search for neutrality nor by collaborative, fact-oriented search for knowledge, but rather by disputes between Wikipedians' personal interpretations of truth and their attempts at appropriation of meaning. Wikipedia's political process is in the end profoundly ambiguous. The NPoV policy's meaning to Wikipedians and how it is applied by them is surrounded by ambiguity. In the end, the ability of the NPoV policy to guarantee neutral content is questioned, and the practices resulting from policy interpretation seem to take Wikipedia in an opposed direction to the encyclopedia's original spirit.

Consequently, the application of policy in order to govern Wikipedian behavior is not consistently applied. The most basic discursive action which Wikipedians perform is deciding whether text, links or images should be included, kept, deleted or reordered. Policies provide a framework for these practices, however, due to the constant need for policy interpretation, immediate action that could resolve possible issues is not taken (Kriplean et al., 2008). When topics are inherently controversial, such as current wars,

Wikipedians have a hard time writing neutrally, so Kriplean et al. (2007) consider that policies are ultimately useful to the extent in which interested parties can argue for their relevance during content disputes. Appeals to Wikipedia policies during discussions are thus inconsistent and often lead to further debates over their interpretations as they are applied to different contexts. This means that despite invocations of policy in attempts to solve a dispute, there will still be confrontation when Wikipedians think that they might influence content through their own understandings of how Wikipedia practices, rules and regulations should be. All of these types of practices are classified by Kriplean et al. (2007) as **power plays**, enumerated below:

There are seven types of power plays (figure 8): **article scope** is put in play when an individual or a core group of Wikipedians attempt to delimit which content is central and which is peripheral to the article in dispute; **prior consensus** is used where current decisions within content disputes are based on past agreements which are then deemed uncontested and absolute; **power of interpretation** is wielded when one sub-community possesses greater authority than another within the discussion; **legitimacy of the contributor** is put in question when the reputation and expertise (or lack of thereof) of a Wikipedian is used as an argument in order to reinforce or undermine a position; **threat of sanction** is used in order to influence content through the application of built-in sanctioning mechanisms; **practice on other pages** is used to validate content on the grounds that disputed practices are prevalent in other parts of Wikipedia; and finally

legitimacy of source happens when reliability of presented references is questioned during the dispute.

Article scope

- central and peripheral content is strictly delimited by an individual or core group of contributors

Prior consensus

- decisions made in the past are presented as absolute and uncontested

Power of Interpretation

- one sub-community commands greater authority than another

Legitimacy of the contributor

- the traits of a contributor (e.g. his expertise) are used to undermine or bolster a position

Threat of sanction

- threats are made to use sanctioning mechanisms or to pursue formal arbitration

Practice on other pages

- content organization in other articles is used to validate or discredit contributions

Legitimacy of source

- cited source is discredited

Figure 8: Power Plays (Kriplean et al. 2007)

Kriplean et al. (2007) admit that participating in disputes over content strengthens understanding and cooperation among Wikipedians, however, tension arise often enough when Wikipedians dispute content according to their own (legitimate in their eyes) point of view. The authors also note that while most power plays are exerted within the boundaries of Wikipedia goals, rules and regulations, due to inconsistency in their application there is room for abuse. There are many examples to be found where Wikipedians consistently violate policy rules without meaningful consequences. One such example illustrated by Kriplean et al. (2007) shows the content of a prolific Wikipedian within philosophy articles that was challenged by a novice contributor. The original content creator threatened to leave the article, an action which clearly violated Wikipedia policy about article ownership and general civility. However, thanks to the intervention of

a third veteran Wikipedian, the original content prevailed. Consequently, it would appear that in some cases the Wikipedia community is willing to tolerate inappropriate behavior according to its own rules for fear of losing ever more scarce productive contributors who are committed to the encyclopedia.

In summary, after having seen technical aspects of Wikipedia framework, its contributors and its governance, its understanding as a community and the ways in which conflict is generated and solved, this literature review will move on to discussing power and power relations within Wikipedia.

3.3. Power and Wikipedia

Due to its characteristic of being one of the most visited sites online and its quality as a repository of knowledge, Wikipedia has the potential ability to standardize human knowledge, carrying within the power to both reinforce hegemony and unequal power relations and at the same time provide the masses with an opportunity to change social relations in the pursuit of a more equal society. Power can be used in different ways in order to gain political, economic and cultural capital. In modern society, many structures will use particular forms of violence which can help them accumulate power (Fuchs, 2015). For example, corporations may use markets and private property in their favor as a means to accumulate capital, while governments may use institutional power in order to force collective decisions and law enforcement agencies to exert legal forms of physical violence (Fuchs, 2015). Thus, Wikipedia, through its role as an open source collaborative encyclopedia and a verbose collaborative community, on one hand may show new practices that empower users and contributors through sharing general human knowledge and collaborative values, but on the other hand, it may use accumulation and framing of knowledge in order to influence discourse and ideology. Consequently, this part of the

theoretical review will start with an overview of classical understandings of power and domination and how common Wikipedia practices are seen through them.

3.3.1. Objective notions of power

As seen in Fuchs (2015), objective power structures are institutions, nation states, governments, administrative bodies and different law enforcement agencies such as police, military, prisons or judicial systems. Objective power is concentrated within these institutions. The distribution of power in society is managed and constrained through practices and power struggles emerging from these organisms. Thus, objective and subjective power is intrinsically related, as organizations continuously produce the practices, relations and discourse necessary to maintain their influence over further social practices. Weber (1978) sees power as the ability of a person or groups of people to impose themselves against resistance from other participants. This implies that different groups will necessarily struggle for power and that groups will use different forms of coercion to defend their achieved power through domination over those who are subject to it.

Here, I will apply more developed definitions of power to the context of Wikipedia. Habermas' understanding of power is appropriate for this context and they are highlighted below: he sees power as a means for the **realization of collective goals**, and the Wikipedia community as an institution attempts to wield it in order to create its open-access free encyclopedias; additionally, power is wielded through **means of coercion**, which dictate how and which goals should be achieved, and in Wikipedia they are represented through power plays in order to maintain or include desired content (Kriplean et al, 2007); furthermore, power is expressed through **symbols and status**, which are represented in Wikipedia through adminship, tokens of appreciation in the form of barnstars, edit history and contributor reputation, all of which are used in order to influence content; additionally, power resides in **decision making authorities**, which in Wikipedia do not wield significant power as rules and regulations are made by the community as a reflection of its

practices; furthermore, **power of definition** is found to be one of the main topics of contention within the encyclopedia (Stvilia et al., 2005); and **counter power**, is represented by reddit groups, forums and Wikipedia splits and alternatives which do not accept Wikipedia rule; **organization**, represented by the influence of Wikipedia's extensive bureaucracy; and finally **legitimization**, where Wikipedia is understood as an influential actor for the legitimization and standardization of knowledge.

Moreover, Luhman sees power as the tool used in order to force a group or an individual by coercion to act in a way in which they would not do otherwise. Thus, power would mean influence resulting from possible threats or rewards, physical, political or economic, which could desired achieve goals while leaving no space for consensus-seeking practices. Since Luhmann sees power as something necessarily coercive, his understandings imply that consensus-based organizations where goals are achieved by collaboration amongst its participants, should be considered co-operative modes of power instead. Wikipedia has certainly been understood as a consensus-based organization (Fallis, 2008; Liao, 2009; Ferriter, 2009; Kriplean et al, 2007) where governance is enforced through collaboratively creating agreed upon policies that reflect the goals and values of the community. However, it has been indicated that Wikipedia has shown signs of high bureaucratization that has continuously directed its development despite the site's democratic and anarchic perceptions (Muller-Seitz, Reger, 2010) and a rise of a bourgeoisie together with elitism among its editors has been theorized by Kittur et al. (2007).

3.3.2. Subjective notions of power

It would be difficult to understand Wikipedia as an institution that explicitly exerts power and domination on society, as the project is based on collaborative knowledge created by a largely voluntary force that organizes itself with a common goal. Thus, in opposition to objective concepts of power, where power is only located in dominating classes and it is withheld from the powerless, Foucault (1980, p. 119) postulated that power cannot be only

repressive, as in that case we would not manage to constantly obey it. Therefore, power must be a productive network intertwined through the entire social body that operates through daily routines and actions. The exercise of violence may exist in order to generate power, but it is not inherent to it. Foucault (1980, p. 142) however, assumed that “there are no relations of power without resistance”, and that all oppressed groups and individuals have the potential to use that power in an attempt to change their status in society. Following this, Wikipedia might present new opportunities for potential social change. It has been developed on the basis of a good faith culture (Reagle, 2008) and established itself as a symbol of contemporary knowledge with unprecedented opportunities for access (Haider, Sundin, 2010). Furthermore, Wikipedia is seen as a “radical form of anti-credentialism” (O’Neil, 2011) as it has challenged traditional approaches to credibility (Magnus, 2009) by presenting new forms of knowledge that stand against traditional expert-oriented perspectives (Rodriguez, 2007) and created a “significant shift in how knowledge is evaluated and received” (Dede, 2008) in attempts to uproot systemic bias in knowledge (Mendoza, 2009). Moreover, Wikipedia has not only been influencing our epistemological understandings, but it also may provide tools for academic peer-review (Black, 2008), the development and evolution of lesser known languages (Baxter, 2009) and most importantly, new opportunities for deliberative online democracy (Hilbert, 2009; Klemp, Forcehinmes, 2010).

By analyzing disputed articles, this dissertation looks on one side if Wikipedia can claim this progressive power but also in how power issues are to be solved. When analyzing arguments, it is therefore also important to include Giddens approach towards power. He defines power in relationship to collective decisions and resources, where power has the capability to “effectively decide about courses of events, even when others might contest such decisions” (Giddens, 1985, p. 9). For him, power is related to resources, material facilities, means of control, and it is “routinely involved in the instantiation of social practices” where it operates “in and through human action” (Giddens, 1981, p. 49). Both Foucault and Giddens argue that power operates within day-to-day behaviors and social and political relationships of individuals. Giddens refers to this political realm of society

as administrative power (1985, p. 19), which always includes control, surveillance, domination, sanctions, physical violence and threats of the use of violence. Thereby, Giddens finds relationships of domination and coercion to be fundamental aspects of societies.

This seems indeed relevant for Wikipedia: as content is created, collected and developed in Wikipedia articles, there are numerous instances where individual or groups of Wikipedians disagree on what kind of knowledge or information should have its place within the encyclopedia. This has a strong and direct influence on the final knowledge which Wikipedia users receive as they seek information that interests them. Power plays, which have been discussed earlier, are different ways in which Wikipedians attempt to legitimize their control over content (Kriplean et al., 2007), thereby effectively influencing article development.

3.3.3. Political, cultural and economic power in Wikipedia

Fuchs (2015) shows that understanding power through both its objective and subjective aspects allows us to understand power as a dynamic between its practical applications and the structures that wield it. Furthermore, in Fuchs (2003) we can see that Bourdieu (1986) understood economic, political and cultural capital as structures which can influence decisions on behalf of those groups or individuals who have control over them. Thus, power structures can be economic, political and cultural. According to Fuchs (2015), “**economic power** is the disposition over property, **political power** is the capacity to influence decisions that are binding for all, and **cultural power** is the capacity to shape definitions, meanings, interpretations, norms and values”.

Wikipedia does not exert **economic power** as it is an organization largely based on voluntary labor by committed members of its community. It does not generate profits and only manages to maintain its servers solely on donations, eliminating the need for

advertisement. Production, distribution and consumption of knowledge and information as a resource are Wikipedia's economic definition of power. However, it has been shown that the project has little explicit control over its main resource as it has been found that there are no significant traces of a presence of an oligarchy within Wikipedia (Konieczny, 2009), its governance has been trending towards decentralization (Forte, Bruckman, 2008; Forte, Larco, Bruckman, 2005) through an adhocracy-based approach (Konieczny, 2010) developed through consensus by its large community (Hoffman, Mehra, 2009; Reagle, 2010) where its conceived rules and regulations seemed to have small influence in editor behavior (Goldspink, 2010). On the other hand, Sanger, in his account of the early history of Wikipedia (2005) tells how early decisions from positions of power directly affected the way in which the Wikipedia community behaves and the way in which content is created and maintained, particularly in relation to the formation of the first core Wikipedia policies which established the direction in which the project grew. Thus, while today Wikipedia's resources (knowledge and information) are produced according to rules and regulations established and enforced by a large community, it is only so due to being based on the seeds planted by certain specific people (early contributors) with a fairly clear idea of what they wanted to achieve, and they proceeded to make a series of decisions that determined the policy of the project and generated the culture of its supporting community. Sanger's conclusion was that the system in place in the Wikipedia is not the only way to run a wiki or an open encyclopedia and it was a consequence of direct involvement by early contributors in positions of power that cannot be found within the community today.

Political power in Wikipedia would imply control over Wikipedia's bureaucracy, its governance, the arbitration committee, and the existence of superior influence over content from Wikipedian administrators over standard contributors that would facilitate influence on collective decisions on knowledge co-production within the site in order to disseminate it to the outside world. According to Konieczny (2010) a control over Wikipedia governance would imply control over the development of its policies. Konieczny pondered whether Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy (1915), could be determined within the development process of one of the key policies within Wikipedia, namely the Verifiability

policy (Wikipedia: Verifiability, 2017). The Law of Oligarchy stated that a rule by the elites would be eventually be inevitable for every organization due to the necessity of tactical and technical choices which could only be taken by leading individuals. Konieczny's data showed that if a case for oligarchy within Wikipedia exists, it either does not wield significant power or it has no interest or need to influence Wikipedia policy. Additionally, while admin selection criteria can often be based on interpersonal interactions between contributors and peer recognition rather than experience and editing merits (Okoli, Oh, 2007; Leskovec 2010a), Konieczny (2010) found no correlation between being an administrator and winning edit disputes or having their edits undisputed. It seems then that admins are more akin to public servants than political rulers. Their role can be compared to that of a janitor who does hold some power over the inhabitants of a building, but has no sway in the way in which they should live their lives. On the other hand, veteran editors have experience with Wikipedia's rules, regulations, tools and processes (Konieczny, 2010), which leads them to have a higher rate of getting ahead in content disputes (Preece, Shneiderman, 2009). However, this supposed power that experienced editors might hold over content, namely as small boost in winning content disputes, seems very limited. There are different degrees of power structures which range from very open, in regards to freedom and rights; and very closed, which are coercive and thereby minimize said freedom and rights (Fuchs, 2015, p.7), and despite signs of bureaucratization or Jimmy Wales being referred to as a "benevolent dictator" by Wikipedians (Müller-Seitz, Reger, 2010), Wikipedia's political power structure certainly seems very open.

Cultural power in Wikipedia would imply control over definitions and meaning. Educational institutions, religions, think tanks and other types of intellectual circles can define moral values for society. For its part, Wikipedia as a database for supposedly neutral knowledge which is agreed upon by a certain representation of society has direct influence on public opinion and ideology. This is precisely where the interests of this dissertation lie. Given Wikipedia's structure and governance, the drive for accumulation of economic capital and political decision power is low or nonexistent. However, the drive for

accumulation of cultural capital in the form of power over meanings and definitions is quite possible. Farrel and Schwartzberg (2008) concluded that avoiding the tyranny of the minorities that overwhelms the majority is a major concern for online community building, and online communities which specifically seek to generate knowledge, rather than generate political actions (such as Wikipedia), are more tolerant towards diversity of points of view and opinions. Is this however the case for Wikipedia? Oboler, Steinberg and Stain (2010) have shed light on the existence of the practice of systematically eliminating criticism. According to them, “some types of editors use criticism elimination to dominate and manipulate articles to advocate political and ideological agendas”. Additionally, Santana and Wood (2009) have argued that Wikipedia is socially irresponsible due to the anonymity of its contributors, and that lack of transparency due to anonymity can be often employed by powerful actors such as corporations, governments and other ideology-driven institutions. It is therefore necessary to research the intricacies of knowledge creation and reproduction within those Wikipedia articles whose topics have the power to shape cultural values and that which “is considered important, reputable and worthy in society” (Fuchs, 2014, p.79).

3.3.4. Symmetrical and asymmetrical power relations in Wikipedia

Thus, power takes on economic, political and cultural form, and Bourdieu’s (1986) notions regarding accumulation of capital describe modern society “as a class system based on the accumulation of economic, political and cultural capital” (Fuchs, 2015, p8). In the same way as power struggles in the form of political elections, armed conflicts, industrial conflicts and everyday disputes produce and reproduce objective power structures and its underlying institutions such as laws, police, nation states, bureaucracy etc.; power struggles over Wikipedia content and the structural framing of its articles in certain specific ways produce and reproduce Wikipedia culture, its values, its traditions, its norms and its practices, which have a direct influence over the future development of general knowledge in an attempt to consolidate cultural power and maintain hegemonic status quo.

Wikipedia's supposed anonymity makes it difficult to discern whether its structure and knowledge production processes may be influenced by different social groups depending on different outcomes of power struggles over content.

Power in Wikipedia is the power over content. Distributions of power can be **symmetrical or asymmetrical**. Fuchs (2015) explains that systems and communities which are highly co-operative, inclusive and based on shared goals and motivations that are characterized by solidarity and altruism (we have seen how altruism is one of the main attributes of Wikipedia contributor motivation) are not without power, but in such systems, power is found to be rather **symmetrical**, with low expressions of domination. However, systems with **asymmetric** distributions of power which are characterized by high degrees of domination always include sanctions, repressions and threats of violence. In more symmetrical distributions of power, different actors may of course influence decisions; however, in asymmetrical systems some actors may take control of resources in order to influence decisions and opposition to those decisions can thereby be quenched and circumvented. It has been shown previously that the possibility of the existence of an oligarchy or a secret cabal of admins directly controlling Wikipedia is unlikely. However, it is a common practice for users to perform power plays (see figure 7) in an attempt to justify, defend and solidify the permanence of their content. As mentioned earlier Matei and Dobrescu (2011), have shown the inconsistency in policy interpretation; and that decisions over how a piece of text, link or image should be included or whether it should be reordered or rephrased is the main discursive work that Wikipedia contributors engage in when vying for content, and *power plays* are the ways in which Wikipedians can attempt to legitimize their control over content through the use of Wikipedia policy discourse (Kriplean et al, 2007).

The power of *prior consensus* seems to be a key power relation struggle within Wikipedia the talk pages. In the article What Wikipedia is Not (2017), the Wikipedia policy explicitly attempts to avoid voting as a substitute for discussion and search for consensus. Consensus

seekers are therefore continuously challenged, since struggling for consensus over and over on the same issues during the development of articles can be a difficult and exhausting task. In the end, according to Kriplean et al. (2007) this exhaustion of participating Wikipedians leads to silence becoming consent, as many potential issues are not questioned. However, for popular and controversial subjects, Wikipedians are forced to continuously monitor changes in an effort to maintain their contributions and an agreeable development for the articles in which they participate. In turn, as new cohorts of contributors arrive, Wikipedians are constantly required to dialectically battle in order to justify and protect their work. Thus, maintenance of content becomes a real struggle, and prolific contributors can become exhausted with the task and end up withdrawing themselves from the consensus-seeking process. When individual or groups of Wikipedians do manage to control an article's content, any prior consensus achieved may become impossible to contest, preventing different points of view from gaining access to the article while at the same time concealing the original discursive practices which allowed consensus to be reached in the first place within the haystack of Wikipedia history. This issue goes against Wikipedia's idea that anyone should be able to edit content, as gaining access to content for new editors becomes a difficult task.

On a final note, it would certainly be difficult to justify relating Wikipedia power plays such as *threats of sanction or power of interpretation* to physical violence or repression, especially bearing in mind that Wikipedia governance is understood to be fairly transparent and theoretically led and developed by the community. Nonetheless, we have seen that once Wikipedia norms, traditions, values and practices are established, new users tend to blindly reproduce said practices in future contributions and knowledge production. In order to vie for control of Wikipedia's cultural capital and have the possibility to wield its power and influence global values, rather than attempting to influence established policies, it would make sense to frame initial structures and practices within potentially influential new articles in order to push its development towards a specific direction of interest to alleged influencers.

4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The main aims of this dissertation is attempting to understand how conflict is represented through editing and discussion of controversial topics in Wikipedia articles about war and international conflict and how Wikipedians experience their involvement in the contentious processes of co-production of knowledge within such disputed topics in order to see how Wikipedia's structure, functions, governance and practices are capable of dealing with complex, current controversial issues. One of the main particularities of Wikipedia is its ability to provide almost real time information on ongoing issues and events, similar to the functions of mainstream media and news agencies. The key difference is that this information is presented in encyclopedic format by volunteering editors before it is processed and analyzed by qualified experts. Furthermore, Wikipedia intends to promote Neutral Point of View standards that under contentious events like wars, protests, political crisis, etc., can very difficult to uphold. Therefore, achieving the research goals of this dissertation will help to better understand how Wikipedia's central idea, the Neutral Point of View (NPOV) is upheld throughout the process of co-production of knowledge in regards to contentious and possibly partisan disputes for content found

within current, on-going socio-political conflicts where understandings and acceptance of Neutrality becomes a constant struggle.

Wikipedia uses the policy of the NPoV as its standard bearer. The application of the NPoV, according to Wikipedia itself in its own policy page⁹, consists in the application of different specific practices; good research, due/undue weight, balance or impartial tone to name a few, as well as some suggestions in the ways in which contributors should handle neutrality disputes. Conversely, within socio-political articles about war and international conflicts potentially partisan views continuously struggle for the prevalence on their content.

In order to access on-going socio-political events such as wars and international conflicts on the Wikipedia site, a first look took this research to Wikipedia's Current Events portal¹⁰, which features ongoing contentious articles. As seen in the section about power in Wikipedia, ownership over content in potentially influential articles can contribute to the accumulation of cultural capital in order to maintain unequal power relations. The critical analysis of these articles will be useful in order to understand how conflict is represented through the discussions and editing processes observed within, and how Wikipedians and Wikipedia itself attempt to produce neutral encyclopedic knowledge. The *Current Events* portal features a daily news section that shows updates in

Ongoing events [hide]

Business

- [1MDB scandal](#)
- [Turkish currency and debt crisis](#)

Culture

- [Weinstein effect](#)

Disasters

- [2018 Atlantic hurricane season](#)
- [2018 North Indian Ocean cyclone season](#)
- [2018 Pacific hurricane season](#)
- [2018 Pacific typhoon season](#)
- [2018 California wildfires](#)
- [2018–19 European windstorm season](#)

Politics

- [Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination](#)
- [Brexit negotiations](#)
- [European migrant crisis \(timeline\)](#)
- [Iranian protests](#)
- [Iraqi protests](#)
- [Nicaraguan protests](#)
- [Romanian protests](#)
- [Qatar diplomatic crisis](#)
- [Rohingya persecution in Myanmar](#)
- [Spanish constitutional crisis](#)
- [Trump administration family separation](#)

Figure 9: Current Events

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Current_events

current events, as well as a sidebar with a selection of ongoing events divided in categories such as business, disasters, law, political and sport (figure 9). Further down, we can find a sidebar specifically categorizing ongoing conflicts divided by continent (figure 10). These current ongoing socio-political articles can potentially provide plenty of information about how users create and manage new information about sensitive issues that are bound to be subject to challenges related to bias, neutrality and international power relations, thereby becoming a suitable textual corpus for the analysis of its underlying discourses.

First, the featured articles under the *ongoing conflicts* and *ongoing events* sidebar were observed, which included several current military conflicts. Within each article, aside from the main content, one can find the following: the article's main headings and sub-headings; which themes are of primary and which or secondary importance; the origin of the article's main references; topics that arise in the talk page and how they are discussed; and additionally, the revision history including all its deletions and contributions. By looking through this information, it was apparent that as users begin to contribute to controversial articles, disputes within the early development of the article inevitably arise over content, format, structure, sources, sub-topics and other different article attributes. As mentioned before in the literature review, these disputes are solved through Wikipedia resolution practices among the contributors that participate in building the article. These early resolutions set precedents in the way in which the article moves forward in terms of what structure it is set on, what sort of sources are considered reliable, which topics or issues are emphasized, which are deemed peripheral and which are dismissed. In time, these practices that were laid out



Figure 10: Ongoing conflicts

by early contributors, which seemed to be particular to the development of each article, become accepted and normalized, and new users arriving with the intention to contribute generally may end up reproducing the established norms (Emigh, Herring, 2006). Thus, a digital battle for content, meaning and ideology rages on while mirroring the unfolding of events in the real world. Wikipedia practices intend to represent the standards of the Neutral Point of View; however, especially in articles of socio-political nature, various degrees of partisanship manifest themselves discursively within talk-pages and edit wars while Wikipedians battle for the prevalence of their content. These practices are ultimately produced and reproduced through discourse, and therefore, this dissertation will pursue a Critical Discourse Analysis approach (CDA) in order to shed light on how this conflict for content is represented through editing and discussion in Wikipedia articles regarding armed conflicts, in an attempt to establish which topics related to Wikipedia are discussed during the editing process (RQ2a), and what are the processes which Wikipedians use in order to legitimize their content (RQ2b). This CDA approach will be applied to the textual corpus found within three selected articles and the result of fourteen semi-structured interviews performed on a selection of its influential contributors. The following section 4.2 will describe the Critical Discourse Analysis methodology, the way in which data is selected; it will offer a discussion on the immanent discourse topics and how the analysis will be developed. Section 4.3 will discuss the interviewee selection for the study, its purpose, the development and justification for the interview guide together with ethical concerns related to the interview.

4.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Unger, Wodak and Khosravini (2016) understand Critical Discourse Analysis as an interdisciplinary research program constructed for the purpose of addressing a specific problem. It is comprised of different approaches from diverse theoretical methods and models with different goals in mind. The link between these approaches is established by the common interest in semiotic dimensions of power and their potentially unjust

applications which can influence cultural and social change. Wikipedia's political, economic and cultural dimensions of power and the online encyclopedia's social and cultural impact in society have been discussed in the literature review of this dissertation. "Semiotic" in the case of Wikipedia refers to the system of signs used during the development of an article, such as words, images, headings, figures, etc, that are used in significant ways.

According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), to CDA scholars, discourse is understood as a form of social practice. A two-way relationship is implied between the discursive event that is researched and the institutions, social structures and situations that frame it. In a situation of war and articles about conflict, discussions over contentious controversial content on the Wikipedia do not only conform to Wikipedia governance norms and established processes, but they are also influenced by news media practices, international relations, governmental agendas and particular ideologies. Furthermore, Wikipedia's community creates its own social structure (Forte, Bruckman, 2008), where registered or unregistered users, administrators, arbitration committee members or simple veterans within Wikipedia as a whole, or the edited article in particular wield different amounts of respect, voice and influence regarding the final outcomes of content and disputes. The discursive event, in this case the editing discussion, shapes the Wikipedia article in particular, and the encyclopedia in general, and in turn, the discursive event itself is shaped by structural practices of the site, thereby becoming socially consequential and giving rise to crucial questions of power. The underlying discourses found within may have major ideological effects, especially considering information about war and international conflicts, where power relations have the potential to be unequally reproduced among ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities, nation-states, social classes or political ideologies (Unger, Wodak and Khosravini 2016).

This research is based on the analysis of three current, on-going, socio-political Wikipedia articles on armed conflicts, particularly the textual corpus corresponding to the discussions

among Wikipedians within the article *talk page*, an analysis of rational discourse for prominent conflicts between Wikipedians within, as well as interviews with key actors involved in these discussions. Texts will be analyzed against non-overlapping contributor discursive topics present in the editing conflicts over content, involving the ways in which Wikipedia contributors participate in the co-creation of knowledge, the ways in which disputes among contributors are resolved and understandings of the objects over which disputes arise. The following list will enumerate the steps necessary to carry out a Critical Discourse Analysis which are explained in the subsequent sections.

- 1) Define the fields of action where the discourses of interests take place.
- 2) Identify and define the discourse topics which contributors produce.
- 3) Develop the application of the critical discourse analysis.
- 4) Provide a theoretical and contextual interpretation of discourse.

4.2.1. Definition of Fields of Action

For the purpose of this research *current, on-going, contentious, socio-political* articles will be analyzed in order to understand how conflict is represented throughout its editing and discussions processes, as well as to understand how Wikipedians experience their involvement in said processes. The *talk pages* of these articles can be accessed in the form of written documents that can allow the researcher to produce various levels of interpretation as well as provide stability of the information for reliability purposes. Furthermore, interview with the authors of content, veteran Wikipedia contributors and topic-specialists will be able to add further details to the thick descriptions of the inner on-goings of the selected articles.

Exemplary documents should be able to enlighten issues put forward by the questions arising from this research. They should be central to Wikipedia's role as an encyclopedia which has the potential ability to provide reliable information on on-going conflicts, where

this ability is constantly challenged, and have a paradigmatic value represented through its ability to influence and represent similar issues found within other documents either by its direct power to establish norms or its indirect ability to set precedents. Because this research looks at representations of conflict throughout editing and discussion practices involving co-production of knowledge, written documentation was selected in the form of Wikipedia talk-pages from socio-political articles.

For this purpose, chosen articles are required to be *current and on-going* as they are set between the time period in which current news are published and research and history books are written (Lih, 2004). This can be a great representation of the period in which trends are generated and solidified within Wikipedia's co-production of knowledge and its influence on encyclopedic content and thereby influence on cultural capital for posterity. Articles of *socio-political* nature are chosen because socio-political topics have the potential to be a great influence over the way in which the world is understood. The practices, norms and traditions generated within *socio-political* articles influence and shape general knowledge and ideological tendencies in specific directions. Finally, the *contentious* property of an article, where editors are constantly competing over the prevalence of their contributions, and thereby creating *controversy* within the article's content, is a paramount attribute because it is precisely in these types of articles where Wikipedia's ability to provide *neutral* encyclopedic content is continuously challenged. This challenge creates conflict over the prevalence of content between defenders of Wikipedia's goals and its main policy - the Neutral Point of View - against partisan motivations.

The articles for a proper development of this research need to be determined regarding their size and relevance represented by conflicts over content within. There is a wide range of possibilities on what material to look at and how closely, with different benefits. A dataset with an extensive number of articles, for example, has the benefits of a large sample that is able to contain many different articles from several regions and topics, thereby

providing more comparative possibilities. A large number of articles would require however a quantitative approach. While such an approach could be beneficial in order to search for patterns and generalizations for Wikipedia processes as a whole, given the vast amount of data available in Wikipedia, it would require a computational approach. However, such an approach leaves out the analysis of how humans communicate and of the contexts, contradictions and power structures in which communications are embedded (Fuchs, 2018). Large articles are understood as those with the highest amount of discussion topics within the *talk page*. A large and highly controversial article such as the *Syrian Civil War* has 45 archived pages with about 30 discussion topics per page. A more manageable medium sized article such as the *Yemeni Civil War* currently has 69 discussion topics inside the *talk page*. Small-sized articles, those with enough developed content but little or not enough pertinent discussion, might not contain enough significant discussions over content in order to establish significant examples of relations between contributor practices and content outcome even if they might be easier to manage. Finally, a rigorous analysis of a large and popular article, such as the *Syrian War* for example, while still current and ongoing, will have gone through a highly complex developmental process that will have yielded its own traditions, practices and norms, which can be thoroughly analyzed for a better understanding of the way in which Wikipedia manages co-production of knowledge while dealing with issues of neutrality. While a study based on the creation and development of such a complex article is certainly meaningful, it would be challenging to justify how the research outcomes of one single article can be extrapolated to other articles about war or international conflicts. Therefore, medium sized articles (somewhere between 2 and 20 pages of discussion archives) seem to be the most promising as they are able to deliver enough material. They have already developed their own significant co-production practices discussed further above, but still remain in manageable proportions for the sake of a comparative analysis which could highlight underlying discourses regarding the ways in which Wikipedia contributors deal with controversial editing and the challenges to the project's goal of Neutral Point of View. A group of three representative medium-sized

articles that can be thoroughly studied and compared would be the ideal format for this purpose.

In order to generate suitable dataset of current, on-going, contentious, socio-political articles several more variables such as *region, socio-political topic, developmental stage and consensus stage* have been considered. Knowledge and truth develop in particular places. Shapin (1998) and Latour (1988) argued that “the foundation of European science lies in the massive accumulation of basic knowledge of the world made possible by Europe’s central position in a system of colonial empires” (as cited in Takhteyev 2012, p43). Therefore, an article’s *region* is an important attribute necessary for the consideration of possible western-centric biases affecting the co-production of Wikipedia knowledge which would have a direct impact into potential neutrality and hegemonic discourses. According to Graham (2015), the geographical origin of Wikipedia’s participants is highly uneven, and many articles about particular regions are edited by non-locals. Interestingly, the tendency from economic peripheries is reversed, and Wikipedians from those regions participate more in editing about the world’s cores instead. A data set comprised of non-western regions has the possibility of shedding light on contributor behaviors regarding western ideological influence and unravel possible issues of legitimization of hegemonic power relations, while a set of mainly western conflicts will only be able to deal with issues concerning the global cores.

The choice of a *socio-political* topic will influence the types of disputes found in the article and the ways in which ideological positions are framed by contributors throughout its development. The three most prominent topics found within the most recent on-going socio-political articles were *war, economy and migration*. While all three offer excellent study possibilities, *war* was the only topic in which it would be easy to find current on-going Wikipedia articles for different global regions that are developed enough for a proper analysis. Thus, it was decided that *war* will be a suitable topic of choice as a representation of geopolitics, Neutral Point of View and neutrality on Wikipedia. *Economy and migration*

among others have been considered with datasets that included different topics within several or single regions.

Finally, the chosen articles must be in a period of **contention** where edit wars, discussions and conflicts are prevalent enough so that underlying discourses related to the way in which the community of contributors deals to challenges to Wikipedia's perceived Neutral Point of View are abundant. Furthermore, an early **developmental** stage in which an article has not reached a period of stability will be useful in order see underlying discourses where media priming¹¹ (Roskos-Weoldsen, 2002) may still be rampant.

With the goal of finding the best possible research outcomes, based on the aforementioned characteristics, groups of articles have been assembled as follows:

- 1) Articles from the same region (western) and a different topic.
- 2) Articles from the same region (non-western) and a different topic.
- 3) Articles with the same topic (war) and a different region.
- 4) Articles with the same topic (economy) and a different region.
- 5) Articles with a different topic in a different region.
- 6) Articles with the same topic but in a different developmental stage.
- 7) Articles in different consensus stages; never-ending wars, temporary consensus, stable consensus.

Option #3, comprised of four articles, each from a different region on the topic of war includes all the best necessary qualities for study for the following reasons:

After exhaustive reading and annotation, the following topics were determined to fit in this category: Articles on the, the War in Darfur, the War in Donbass and the Yemeni Civil

¹¹ Influence of media content on people's thoughts, beliefs, judgements and behavior.

War are all found to be **current**, thereby still participant of the knowledge gap between news and history; **contentious**, where editors are constantly competing over the prevalence of their content; **socio-political**, with strong influence on general knowledge and ideology; **large** enough to have developed their own particular co-production practices but still manually manageable; from **periphery regions**, where western ideological influence on periphery knowledge might be observed; with the **topic of war**, where through geopolitics, contributors explicitly deal with power relations, hegemony and neutrality issues; and in a **contentious and early development stage** where knowledge comes from journalistic, rather than historical sources.

4.2.2. Wikipedia discourse topics

Rather than asking themselves what grand theory is necessary in order to investigate specific problems with society, Wodak and Meyer (2001) ponder about what type of conceptual tools can be useful for particular problems in a particular context. Fairclough (1995) states that discourse convey social practice from a certain perspective. Thus, particular discursive practices establish a dialectical relationship with Wikipedia articles about armed conflicts within our context. Immanent discourses affect and are in turn affected by the social context in which they dwell.

It is from the ambiguity over conflict resolutions and interpretations of policy (see section 2.2.9) that a dialectic between the Neutral Point of View and Partisanship arises as a representation of conflict in the editing and discussion of controversial articles (Aim1). As Wikipedians vie for the prevalence of their accepted content, interpretations and even rejections of the idea of the Neutral Point of View appear. On the one hand, involved Wikipedians attempt to pursue the NPoV from a fully bureaucratic perspective, in an attempt to conform to Wikipedia guidelines. However, as we have seen, Wikipedia's own definition of neutrality is left ambiguous, and many contributors understand this concept according to their own philosophical position, while at the same time struggling for NPoV

meaning. On the other hand, as the discussion for NPoV meaning goes on, contributors with personal or partisan interests may hide behind the banner of neutrality while covertly attempting to push through their own created content. Finally, it is possible that some contributors overtly reject the notion of neutrality by interpreting it as an impossibility, and explicitly take on partisan views by creating partisan content.

Yet, according to Howarth (2010), working coalitions have to be installed and reproduced if they are to be successful. This means that passive or active consent needs to be achieved from its subjects, or in the case of a non-explicitly hierarchical organization such as Wikipedia, its peers, or at the very least a group of fellow Wikipedians need to become compliant to such practices. Thus, hegemonic practices are present in Wikipedia discussions when Wikipedians begin accepting and reproducing practices which they have previously resisted. Following Howarth's (2010) understanding of hegemony we can understand two opposed types to the Wikipedia articles on armed conflicts' context. The first one is "organic hegemony", which is characterized by Wikipedians actively subjecting themselves to a particular practice or consensus, so that explicit actions of power (in our case, power plays) are pushed into the background. This first aspect is manifested in the way in which disagreements are managed through the use of prior established policy or practice, so that the current order regulating content production can be reproduced without dispute. The second form is called "inorganic hegemony", which is characterized by unwilling compliance or even active resistance by Wikipedians so that mechanisms of coercion in the form of explicit contributor power plays are necessary to secure order. This second aspect is manifested through direct contributor confrontation by threats of sanction, arbitration or community pressure. Wikipedia policies and praxis were developed ad-hoc in order to deal with problems within disagreements over content by addressing some of the concerns coming from various groups of initial editors. However, said policies may be articulated in special ways in order to hide unwanted aspects of the policy or agreed practice, with the intent of deviating attention from their original purpose and long-term implications. Hegemonic discourse will be analyzed in order to unravel ways in which disagreements, demands and problems are expressed and handled by the Wikipedian

community as a whole and by the present contributors within the studied articles in particular in ways which would not disturb or modify dominant practices and meanings regarding complex debatable issues such as armed conflicts and the Neutral Point of View. Discursive practices as well as discourse topics throughout which these dichotomies between the Neutral Point of View and partisanship and organic or inorganic hegemony are represented and the production and reproduction of said dichotomies are embedded in the conflict resolution patterns, tactics and strategies that dominant contributors apply in an attempt to vie for the prevalence of their content. They will be described in the following sections.

4.2.2.1. Deliberation objects

The application of data reduction to the vast quantities of raw text that is found within any current, contentious, socio-political Wikipedia article is found to be a necessary process in order to select data that can be relevant to the research question. When thinking of Wikipedia as a system of co-production of knowledge, the *response patterns* theory (Kane et al, 2014) introduces the concept of *deliberations*. Pava (1983) defines the concept of *deliberation* as a disagreement over an issue which produces a discussion between two or more people. Deliberations online, due to their asynchronous property may last anywhere between minutes and years. This depends on when participants join the deliberation, as newcomers may revive old discussion, and resolutions could take a long while to be established. In the case of Wikipedia, deliberations, as the unit of analysis and **genres** within the field of action are identified to be the discussion headings found inside the talk page archives of the studied articles. A *deliberation* is initiated by an actual or proposed change in an article and ends when comments indicate resolution or no additional comments or changes are found.

Once the deliberations within the talk pages of each chosen article representing a field of action have been identified, it is necessary to determine the *deliberation objects*, that is,

the parts and attributes of the article with which the deliberations deal. In order to understand how customs, traditions and norms are discursively established and perpetuated in each article, it is necessary to understand which structural aspects of the article are deliberated upon. The categories have been established through a deductive qualitative approach (figure 11). There are **four** initial categories based on previous observations of Wikipedia articles, their talk pages and conflicts. The objects understood to be deliberated upon through open coding within the Yemeni Civil War article were *organization of the article, titles and headings, order of events, links, figures, maps, wording, article merging and article split*. Additionally, a big part of the edit disputes within controversial articles include discussion about Wikipedia governance, where rules, policies and guidelines are frequently brought up as objects of deliberation. From this it was postulated that when discussions in relation to the **deliberation objects** arise (see figure 11) with regards to questions such as **how** or **where** the information should be placed, they are categorized as **structure**. When discussions arise based on **what** sort of information is included and **why** it belongs in the Wikipedia article, they are categorized as deliberations on **content**. When issues regarding **reliability or validity** of the information are brought up, discussions are

categorized as deliberations on **sources**. When issues involving Wikipedia **policies** are brought up, discussions are categorized as deliberations on **governance**.

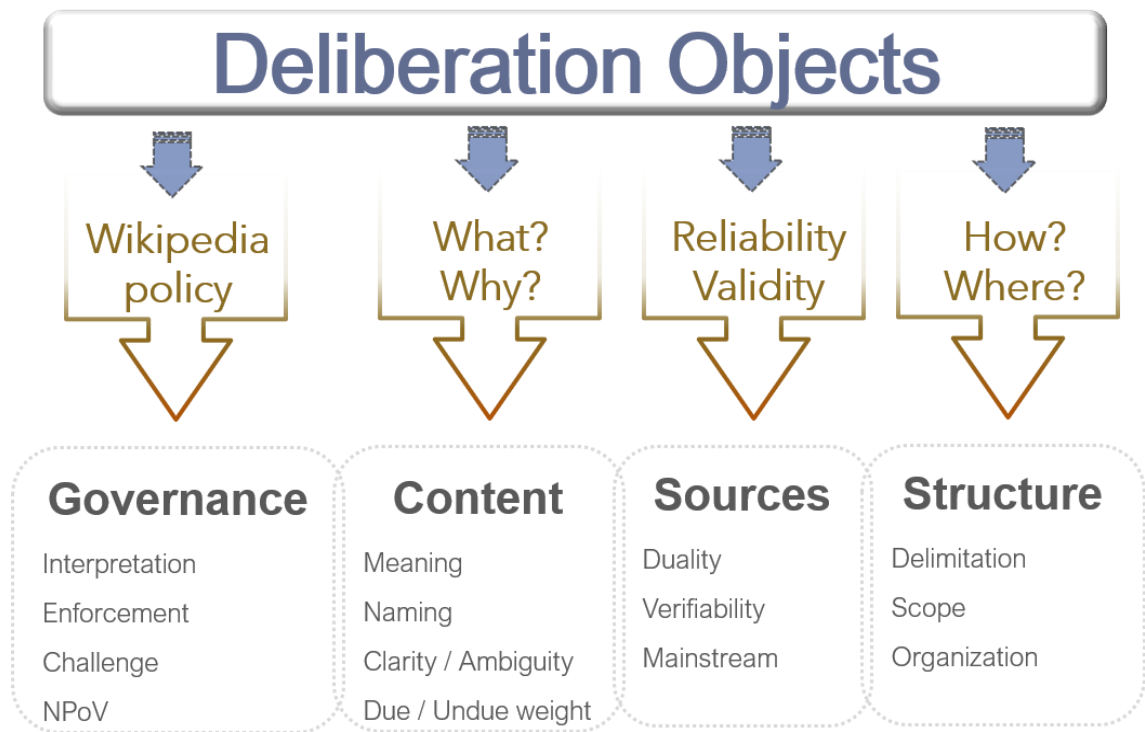


Figure 11: Deliberation objects

Within each of these deliberation objects, discourse topics related to the way in which the Wikipedia community deals with controversial content editing can be identified. They are described in the following section.

4.2.2.2. *Definition of discourse topics*

The way in which Wikipedia functions, its governance, who are its contributors and what are their motivations, what are the project's goal, how information is transmitted and stored, how this information evolves over time and how are conflicts over content resolved is all contextualized in the literature review. These theories provide a framework for the identification of discourse topics potentially present within edit discussions in

controversial ongoing Wikipedia articles about armed conflict. Several of these mid-range theories have been drawn upon in order in order to be able to interpret specific edit discussions within the chosen fields of action. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the discourse topics identified within, which can also be seen in the figure 12.

As mentioned in the previous section, when discussions arise over or include Wikipedia policies, the deliberation object is identified as **governance**. Within this categorization we can find four main discourse topics. First, **policy interpretation**, which is a topic of discussion regarding the meaning and influence of policy, and the ways in which it should be applied. Policy interpretation is one of the main discursive battles that occur in Wikipedia, as depending on how they are used, the outcome could at the same time be an approach to Wikipedia's Neutral Point of View goal, or the use of policy in order to pursue individual or partisan goals. Second, **policy enforcement**, a discursive topic that revolves around the use of policy in order to shape content which can be used as a way to solve or influence content disputes. Third, **policy challenge**, a discourse topic that revolves around questioning the appropriateness of policy application, or the rejection of the policy as a whole. It is important to remember that Wikipedia policies are open ended community agreements over how the encyclopedia should run, and that the rules are not enforced in an overly strict manner. Fourth, **Neutrality**, which is a discourse topic that revolves around Wikipedia's main and only non-changeable policy of Neutral Point of View. Neutrality is a complex subject with many understandings which are under constant dispute, and its discursive struggle is ever present among content disputes.

Under discussion over what sort of information is included and why it deserves to be there, namely, content deliberation objects, we can find another four discourse topics present within the editing conflicts of controversial information. First, we have **meaning**, as a discourse topic. The struggle over the definitions of complex words and concepts such as globalization, conflict, or definitions of values such as freedom, security, fairness, etc, is an ever-present topic in Wikipedia, which shapes the nature of the included content.

Meanings are embedded and perpetuated by the editors which provide the information for consumption of Wikipedia users. Secondly, **naming** is a discourse topic where contributors constantly dispute the nomenclature of issues, i.e. naming belligerents as insurrectionists, separatists, rebels, etc., carries strong underlying meaning related to discourses of neutrality or hegemony, taking into account perceived points of view. Thirdly, the **due/undue weight** discourse; when contributors discuss over the merits of the content that would warrant its presence in the article. The understanding of how much weight should a viewpoint have within an article is a complex discussion which has the potential to guide the development of an article towards specific directions. Lastly, the dichotomy between **clarity** and **ambiguity**, a discursive practice where contributors discuss whether specific information should be presented in a clear and undisputable manner or whether ambiguity in the understanding of concepts that could simultaneously take in account several meanings should be used in order to move forward with the discussion.

Discussions over the reliability and validity of the information present in Wikipedia articles corresponds to deliberations over **sources**. There are three discourse topics identified within. First, the **duality of sources**; this discourse topic promotes the idea that references within articles of war should come from different sources in order to achieve a neutral stance within content. In contraposition, the **verifiability** discourse topic proposes that only cross-referenced sources should be included in the article. Finally, the understanding of what is and who are part of **mainstream media** and whether it should be assumed that its journalistic practices guarantee its objectivity is one of the main topics of dispute in order to legitimize article content. These three discourse topics are some of the main discussion points in relation to western-centrism, hegemony and geopolitics. Often,

sources are deemed adequate based primarily on their geographical location rather than their journalistic merits.

Finally, discussion over how and where the article information should be placed is categorized as a **structure** deliberation object. The first discourse topic is article **scope**. It refers to what information should go in the article and which should be left out or included in other articles. Second, regarding understandings of war and conflict, a big discursive topic is the **delimitation** over the reach of the conflict. Even in modern times, with instant communication, GPS satellites, Internet and mobile phones, the fog of war is as present as ever. As it gets difficult to determine who are the belligerent and where the fighting takes place, Wikipedia contributors struggle over where the conflict takes place, which has a strong influence on the structure and thus the information that may appear in the article. For example, in the War in Donbass article, the delimitation discourse has to deal with understanding whether the conflict is in the whole Ukraine, Eastern Ukraine, the Donbass region, only the cities/regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and thus the information that should go into the article is directly dependent on it. Finally, the **organization** of the article

POLICY INTERPRETATION	→	topic of discussion regarding the meaning and influence of policy, and the ways in which it should be applied
POLICY ENFORCEMENT	→	topic that revolves around the use of policy in order to shape content which can be used as a way to solve or influence content disputes
POLICY CHALLENGE	→	topic that revolves around questioning the appropriateness of policy application, or the rejection of the policy as a whole
NEUTRALITY	→	topic that revolves around Wikipedia's main and only non-changeable policy of Neutral Point of View
MEANING	→	the struggle over the definitions of complex words and concepts such as globalization, conflict, or definitions of values such as freedom, security, fairness, etc
NAMING	→	topic where contributors constantly dispute the nomenclature of issues
DUE / UNDUE WEIGHT	→	when contributors discuss over the merits of the content that would warrant its presence in the article
CLARITY / AMBIGUITY	→	a practice where contributors discuss whether specific information should be clear or ambiguous
DUALITY OF SOURCES	→	topic that promotes the idea that references within articles of war should come from different opposing sources
VERIFIABILITY	→	topic that proposes that only cross-referenced sources should be included in the article
MAINSTREAM MEDIA	→	topic that discusses what is and who are part of mainstream media
SCOPE	→	what information should go in the article and which should be left out or included in other articles
DELIMITATION	→	topic that discusses the reach of the conflict

Figure 12: Discourse topics

is a discourse used in order to guide and shape its content. Contributors struggle over headings, sub-headings, figures and maps, and the way in which this information is shown.

These aforementioned discourse topics are the primary focus of discussion within armed conflict articles in Wikipedia because of their influence in the way in which information is gathered, shaped, structured and presented, which in turn shapes society's perception of specific deeply ideological events such as wars and armed conflicts.

4.2.3. Application of CDA

This research adapts Wodak and Meyer's (2001) discourse historical approach in order to make sense of the underlying discourses behind contributor participation in on-going socio-political Wikipedia articles about war and international conflicts. Through systematic and transparent investigation of semiotic data acquired in the talk pages of selected Wikipedia articles and the results from the semi-structured interviews on influential article contributors, this research will position itself around the concept of social critique which will embrace three aspects: first, a **discourse critique** which will attempt to highlight contradictions, inconsistencies, dilemmas and paradoxes in internal textual and discursive structures; second, a **socio-diagnostic** critique which will attempt to illustrate manipulative discursive practices and specify how Wikipedians are exposed to them. For this purpose, knowledge about the context will be used in order to situate the discursive event in a wider frame of geo-political relations and issues. Thirdly, a **prognostic critique** which will attempt to contribute to the improvement of communication within the Wikipedia organization.

Furthermore, the understanding of context takes into account four levels. **1)** Immediate language and textual corpus – article talk pages and the deliberations over content; **2)** intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between the fields of action, texts and discourses – that is practical relationships between the development of the three chosen

articles, the contributors which participate across them and the manifestation of similar discourses and discursive practices; **3)** the extralinguistic social and sociological variables and institutional frames – Wikipedia’s community, goals, organization, governance and policy, the understanding of the Neutral Point of View, and **4)** the broader historical and sociopolitical contexts in which these discursive practices occur – hegemony, power relations, international conflicts and diplomacy, geopolitics, epistemology.

After having provided necessary background information in order to understand the researched object, which is in extent defined by the discourse topics shown in the previous section, a linguistic analysis of the topics will be produced on the basis of linguistic and

rhetorical means by which persons relate to each other within a dispute. Following from Wodak and Meyer (2001), five simple questions applied to edit conflicts are highlighted:

1. How are persons named and referred to linguistically?
2. What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?
3. By what means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimize the exclusion, discrimination or suppression of other contributors' content?
4. From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attributions and arguments expressed?
5. Are these utterances openly articulated? Are they intensified or mitigated?

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential/nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	* Membership categorization
Predication	Labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively	* Stereotypical, evaluative attribution of negative or positive traits * Implicit and explicit predicates
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	* Justification of political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment
Perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	* Reporting, description, narration or quotation of events and utterances
Intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	* Intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of utterances

Figure 13: Discursive Strategies (Wodak and Meyer, 2001)

Thus, this research is interested in five types of discursive strategies related to the positive presentations of a contributor's own content and the negative representation of disputed

content of others. “Strategy” (see figure 13), in this context means a more or less intentional plan comprised of discursive practices which are used in order to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim. These discursive practices are systematically applied over the textual analysis of the discussions over content within the chosen articles on armed conflict. Discursive topics found within the deliberation object are identified and made explicit, in order to see how conflict is represented within. See figure below (figure 14).

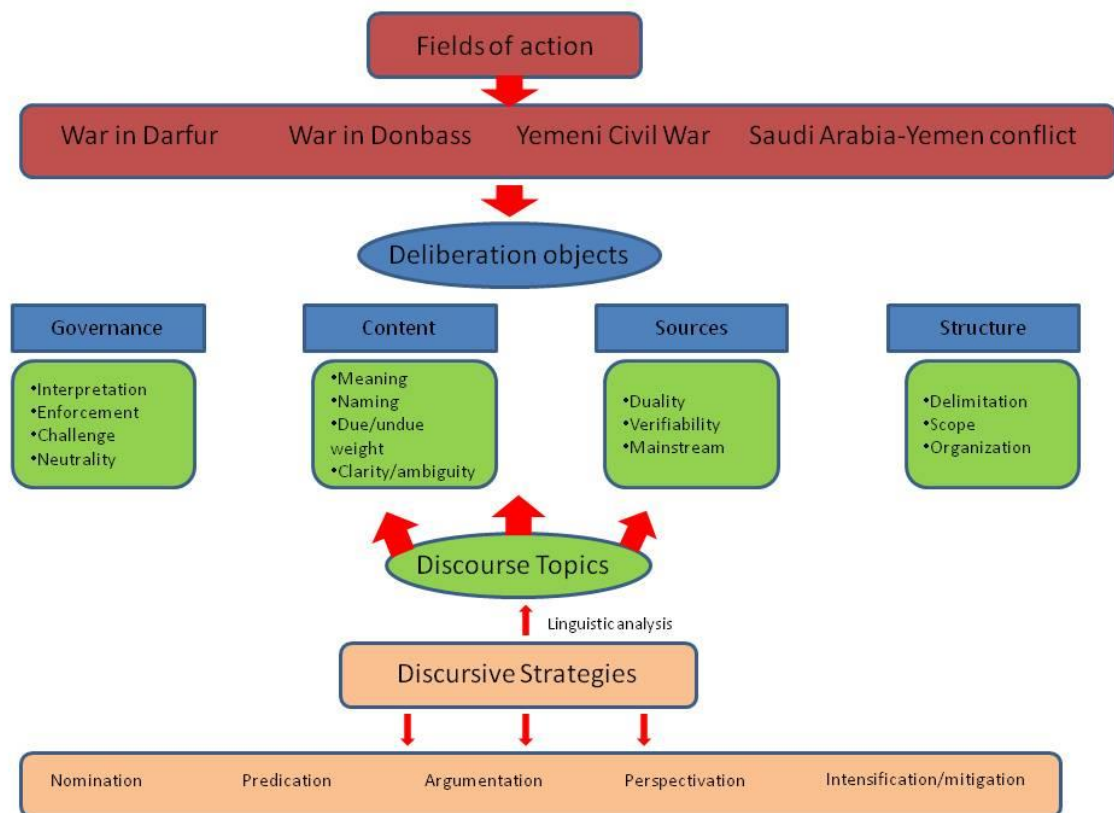


Figure 14: Discourse Model

Discursive strategies employed for representation of the self and the other, the labeling of said nominations and the argumentations used to justify attributions are specific to the particular nature of Wikipedia. The purpose of the nomination discursive strategy is to include or exclude people from certain groups and proceed to portray them in a negative

or positive way. The purpose of the analysis is to expose how actor descriptions perpetrated by Wikipedians during their deliberations affect their relationship with disputed topics. Within our researched contexts – the wars in Ukraine, Yemen, Darfur and the underbelly of Wikipedia itself- there are several social actors addressed which are formed into groups by Wikipedian discourse through a collectivization process. 1) Wikipedians, self-referenced by their actions: “this is what **we** do”, or referenced by others as a criticism to the encyclopedia: “Wikipedia is biased” (and by extension so are Wikipedians). 2) Point of View pushers, people who according to accusers deliberately violate Wikipedia regulations in order to impose a personal agenda. 3) Pro/anti [nation], which groups people into national collectives with specific agendas in line with specific nations.

In order to determine the referential nature of this discursive strategy, two linguistic expressions are paid attention to. First, deictic expressions that function as personal pronouns, demonstratives, adverbs or tense which point to a time, place or situation in which a speaker is performing. For example, expressions such as “we”, “they”, “you” can be used to designate speakers as outsiders or insiders to a group (Chilton, 2004). Second, actionyms are used to nominate groups in relation to something that they do (Leeuwen, 2008), both in a positive or negative fashion.

Furthermore, the purpose of the predication discursive strategy in Wikipedia is to label nominated social actions by stereotypical attributions. Wikipedia/Wikipedians are labeled as biased or committed to the NPoV, PoV pushers and pro/anti [nation] groups are labeled as individuals who push for a particular point of view. Additionally, outside organizations such as news media are labeled to be reliable or unreliable; national and international institutions are labeled in terms of their position of support or opposition to participants in

the conflict. Finally, terminology used to affect content, such as names, definitions or titles are labeled to be neutral / non-neutral / biased / unbiased.

On the other hand, the argumentation strategy relies on the use of topoi (Reisigl, Wodak, 2009). Topoi are understood as content that connects premises to conclusions. They are stereotypical arguments which imply common sense and are employed in order to influence people to change their perceptions, attitudes and views (Wodak, Meyer, 2001). Argumentation topic applicable to Wikipedia discourse do not exist, so a preliminary approximation to these discursive practices is elaborated during the textual analysis of the researched article talk pages within this dissertation (see topoi table in chapter 5).

Finally, perspectivization and intensification/mitigation strategies do not have significant variances in the application to Wikipedian discourse. Perspectivization deals with the positioning and expression of the speaker's point of view in the representation of social actors. Arguments of said social actors are described by the speaker. An expression of these arguments and points of view is developed through the intensification/mitigation discursive strategy. Its devices applicable to Wikipedia discourse include modal verbs, tag

questions, subjunctives, hyperboles, use of quotations, litotes and verbs of saying, thinking and feeling (see figure 15) (Wodak, Meyer, 2001)

Referential / Nomination Strategy	
Groups	Definitions
1 Wikipedians	members of the encyclopedia who conform to its rules
2 PoV pushers	contributors who deliberately violate rules / do not edit naturally
3 Pro / Anti [Nation]	contributors with specific agendas aligned with nation-states

Predication Strategy	
Actors	Labels
1 Wikipedian /Wikipedians	is / are biased / committed to the NPoV
2 Pro / Anti [Nation]	push for particular points of view
3 News media	reliable / unreliable
4 Nation-states and national organizations	oppose / suport participants in the conflict
5 Terminology (names, definitions, titles, etc)	neutral / non-neutral / (un)biased

Perspectivization Strategy	
Position and expression of the speaker's point of view in the representation of social actors	

Identification / Mitigation Strategy	
Devices	
1 Use of quotations to support an argument	
2 Use of modal verbs	can, could, may, might, will, shall, should, ought, must/have to, would
3 Use of tag questions	aren't I?, will you?, shall we?, won't you?, isn't it?, aren't they?
4 Use of subjunctives	
5 Hyperboles	claims not meant to be taken literally
6 Litotes	ironic understatements
7 Verbs	of saying, thinking and feeling

Figure 15: Wikipedia discursive strategies

4.2.4. Theoretical Interpretation

Wodak and Meyer (2001) stress what are to be the most important characteristics of their discourse-historical approach.

First, the approach is characterized by **interdisciplinarity** found on several levels. In theory, in the work itself, in teams and in practice: that is, conflict in controversial Wikipedia articles spreads through different fields, such as communication, sociology, history, international relations or epistemology. It permeates Wikipedia governance, Wikipedia's community organization, its contributors and their personal or collaborative motivations; international power-relations, diplomacy and even in the case of this research, military action. Second, rather than focused on specific linguistic items approach is **problem oriented**. Wikipedia's idea of the Neutral Point of View is constantly challenged on controversial articles about ongoing wars. The resulting conflicts produce and reproduce discourses which due to Wikipedia's goal of providing free universal access to knowledge can potentially have a strong influence on society and therefore they need to be critically analyzed. Third, theories and methods through which we can better understand and explain the objects under investigation such as *response patterns* (Kane et al. 2014), contributor conflict resolution strategies through *power plays* (Kriplean et al. 2007) and conflict resolution through *ambiguity* (Matei and Dobrescu, 2011) are integrated. Additionally, the study incorporates semi-structured interviews with prominent Wikipedia contributors that have significant participation in the selected articles for further analysis and theorizing. Moreover, as multiple genres and public spaces are researched, a constant, retroactive movement between theory and empirical data is necessary because intertextual and interdiscursive relationships under investigation require a constant recontextualization. Wikipedia's historical context, as well as that of the article topics (war and international conflict) needs to be integrated in order to interpret discourses, with its categories and analysis tools defined according to the investigation regarding conflicts represented through the editing process and discussion over selected article content.

Finally, Bourdieu's grand theory of political, cultural and economic power and Gramsci's theory of hegemony serve as a foundation from which the smaller meso-theories draw their discursive justifications for the purposes of critical analysis.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2001), a discourse can begin within one dimension and proceed to develop throughout another one. Discourses then cross between fields of action, deliberation objects, topics and text; they overlap and are socio-functionally linked to each other. Thus, the analysis process would then consist of linguistically analyzing all categories simultaneously through the identification of discursive practices, and establishing their relation by exemplifying key disputes and highlighting how these discursive practices and the discourse topics they are found in affect the idea of the Neutral Point of View and how it is represented in articles of war, where Neutrality is extremely difficult to achieve, and hegemonic legitimization of knowledge is of value to accumulation of cultural capital interests.

4.3. Habermas' Validity claims

Cukier, Bauer and Middleton (2004) explain that communicative rationality can be assessed through the examination of societal and organizational discourses. This notion will be valuable in order to better understand how conflict is represented through the editing and discussion process within controversial Wikipedia articles related to ongoing armed conflicts. Thus, when the ideal speech situation is not realized, as is often the case in controversial articles about war, communication distortions exist. Hansen, Berente and Lyytinen (2009) saw Wikipedia as an environment close to Habermas' ideal of rational discourse as it surmounts the effects of authority and control. However, current and ongoing armed conflicts present a unique challenge for Wikipedia's collaboration practices which might not be easily overcome. Cukier, Bauer and Middleton (2004) continue by stating that communicative rationality can be improved by revealing possible communication distortions, and in our particular case, improve Wikipedia practice.

Applying the standards of rational discourse to underlying ideologies may help to reduce their influence on the decision-making process that affects development of the articles. In this research, special deliberation cases extracted from the studied articles which due to their precedent-setting qualities are found to have a strong influence on the development of said articles, will be analyzed through the use of Habermas' Validity Claims. Cukier, Bauer and Middleton (2004) show that Habermas offers a solid conceptual framework which provides an appropriate standard for determining the validity of communications. It can be used to unearth distortions in discourse which represent power structures and dominant ideologies, and at the same time, it can be applied in order to clean up communication practices in an attempt to improve the collaboration process.

In this analysis, each validity claim is used as an analytical tool through which the text found in the talk page of our chosen articles and related to specific unique deliberations is coded. Habermas proposes four tests, or validity claims which must be present in order to achieve an ideal speech situation: truth, clarity, sincerity and legitimacy¹². According to Habermas, when none of the validity claims are violated through the communicative act by its participants, the resulting situation becomes ideal as it builds comprehension, trust, knowledge and consent - ideal goals which a collaborative knowledge creation project such as Wikipedia can ascribe to -. In contrast, infringement on the validity claims during the

¹² This dissertation uses a translation by Ulrich (2001), as it appeared to be clearer to the author of this research. In *Evolution and Society* (Habermas, 1979) validity claims are translated as truth, rightness, truthfulness and comprehensibility.

communication process results in misrepresentation, confusion, false assurances and illegitimacy (see figure 16).

Validity claim	Result	Distortion
Truth and factuality of presuppositions	Truth	Misrepresentation
Honesty in what is said	Sincerity	False Assurance
Intelligibility and comprehensibility of what is said	Clarity	Confusion
Appropriateness of what is said and done in light of existing norms and values	Legitimacy	Illegitimacy

Figure 16: Habermas' validity claims (Cukier, Bauer and Middleton (2004))

Distortion in discursive practices can be exposed with the help of the application of Habermasian communicative rationality. However, according to Cukier, Bauer and Middleton, Habermas does not apply validity claims as a discourse analysis method. Thus, they propose to combine textual analysis techniques in order to be able to apply Habermas' validity claims to discourse analysis. To assess Habermas' validity claims within Wikipedia talk page deliberations, a series of questions developed by Cukier, Bauer and

Middleton were used in order to allow the claims of truth, sincerity, clarity and legitimacy to be identified in the selected texts.

Cukier, Bauer and Middleton developed the identification of truth claims guided by Michalos' (1986) tests for logic through the use of these questions:

- What are the basic arguments?
- Are the issues clearly defined?
- What evidence has been provided for support?
- Has the information been communicated without distortion or omission?
- Are there ideological claims examined?

We can identify sincerity claims with the help of rhetorical devices based on Van Dijk's (1991, p.116) notion that reporters can show their opinions on news events through choices

of style, which in turn take on ideological and social implications. The following questions are used to determine sincerity claims:

- Use of rhetorical devices?
- What is the choice of metaphors?
- What is the choice of adjectives?
- Do these choices influence interpretation?
- Do these choices promote or suppress understanding?
- Do they create false assurances?

We can determine clarity through the use of questions involving, unfamiliar terminology, jargon and incomprehensible language:

- Use of jargon?
- Use of unfamiliar terminology?
- Use of incomprehensible language?

For the analysis of legitimacy claims, texts that indicated participation in discourse were identified:

- To whom is legitimacy accorded?
- Who is considered an expert? On what basis?
- What is assumed or implied in the discourse?
- How are decisions legitimized?
- Which groups or viewpoints are legitimized or omitted?

Once the deliberation texts have been coded, these questions are used to direct the analysis in order to unravel what misrepresentations of rational discourse occur, why they occur and what does this distorted communication look like?

4.4. Semi-structured Interview

Qualitative research is used by social scientists who are interested in a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior. It has the ability to gather elaborated accounts of human experiences human beliefs, and the contexts in which they develop (Rubin, Rubin, 2005). In order to explore and describe the quality and nature of how people behave, experience and understand, social science often turns to interviews as a powerful tool that can elicit narrative data from people's experiences which can be investigated with more detail (Kvale, 1996; 2003). Interviews allow interviewees to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007, p.96), which can provide invaluable help in order to understand Wikipedians' experience within the analyzed editing and discussion processes.

Bryman (2012) explains that qualitative research emphasizes on greater generality and on interviewees' own perspectives and point of view. Therefore, it is going off on tangents during an interview is often encouraged, as it provides insight on what the interviewees see as important under their own experience. Thus, upon conducting the interview, it is possible to depart from any schedule or guide and ask further follow-up questions depending on the interviewee's replies. As a result, qualitative interviews tend to be flexible relative to the direction that the conversation between interviewer and interviewee takes. In this way, rich, detailed answers that may underline discursive practices are

obtained since the interviewee explains how he or she frames and understands specific issues and events, patterns and forms of behavior that are of interest to the research.

As this research has a clear focus on understanding how conflict is represented through the editing process and discussion involving controversial Wikipedia articles about armed conflicts, the qualitative interview should be of the semi-structured type, that is, consisting of a guide of open questions that address specific issues but encourage open conversation and opinion on the part of the interviewee, which can allow for unexpected responses that were not considered previously by researcher. Therefore, Bryman (2012) proposes research questions to be less specific, so the possibility of alternative enquiries that might arise based on collected interview data is maintained. The enquiry regarding Wikipedians' experience in their involvement with controversial articles about ongoing armed conflicts is general enough that unexpected discursive practices can be unearthed. In this regard, interview questions must conform to the areas that the research needs, but framed from the perspective of the interviewees.

The interview process will first consist of a pre-selection of suitable participants according to different characteristics discussed in the next section. After this, the potential participants will be contacted in order to enquire about the possibility of collaboration. If a participant accepts an interview, an Informed Consent Form and a Participant Information Sheet will be sent to them for their review and any possible concerns will be answered. Participants who have accepted will be asked to contact with the researcher through any voice call software in order to proceed with the interview, which should be no longer than one hour of duration. In some cases, and due to the anonymity feature of Wikipedia, some Wikipedians are not comfortable with a voice call, and they elect a live text chat interview instead. The information gathered from live chat is generally less detailed than that of a voice call, but it still provides valuable insights on Wikipedians' experience in their involvement in discussions regarding controversial Wikipedia articles. Finally, the audio or live chat will be recorded and transcribed. The resulting textual corpus

will undergo a Critical Discourse Analysis developed in the previous section of this methodology chapter.

4.4.1. Selection of Interviewees

In order to attempt to understand how conflict is represented through editing and discussion of controversial Wikipedia articles about war and international conflicts and specifically how do Wikipedians experience their involvement in said discussion, prominent actors need to be contacted for semi-structured interviews which can help shed light on the underlying discursive practices within Wikipedia conflict.

The contributions of any given editors to a specific article can be found within the revision history of the article under the *edits by user* link. Wikipedia Page History Statistics¹³, a tool created by Wikipedia contributor Aka, in order to sort the page history by editor, counts the number of edits for each editor. As we have seen from the literature review, Forte and Bruckman (2008) mentioned three types of users, *unregistered users*, *registered users*, *special power users* (such as admins), and *Arbitration committee members*. While unregistered users may edit, their contributions are seen with more suspicion than those of registered users, and they do not tend to participate in enough edits to be noticed among the top editors of an article. Additionally, due to their low participation in the community, making contact with them for interview purposes would not be useful. Therefore, it is necessary to look at *registered users* who have plenty of participation in the articles of interest judging by their number of edits.

When editing Wikipedia, edits have the option to be marked as minor edits, reflecting brief changes that do not influence content, such as grammar or style corrections. From observation of the extracted statistics with the aforementioned app from the chosen articles,

¹³ <http://vs.aka-online.de/cgi-bin/wppagehiststat.pl>

it seems that some editors prefer to adapt a more *peripheral participation role* (Bryant Forte, Bruckman, 2005), by fixing mistakes and polishing already existing, rather than being content contributors. This leads us to believe that motivations for editors to participate in the discussion are different. Furthermore, the frequency of edits is another interesting attribute. The motivations of a contributor to be in the top by number of edits in contraposition to other contributors which participate less frequently, and the reasons for which some editors keep coming back in order to participate in the conversation versus contributors that chose to leave the conversation, both of these behaviors seen from the perspective of the contributors can help illustrate underlying discursive practices which occur during the editing and discussion process throughout the development of the article. Finally, some prominent editors, cross edit among different articles of the thematic of war, thereby consolidating their status as expert Wikipedians and experts in the topic of war and international conflict. The ways in which their reputation influences conflicts over content can illustrate further communicative practices.

Based on the editor statistics provide by Wikipedian Aka's app, it is possible to identify the following types of Wikipedia contributors which are useful for interview purposes.

1) Full participants: editors who are found to be in the top 5 according to edit count, where most contributions are identified as major edits. Independent of their participation timeline, these are the individuals that have placed the most time and energy into the shaping of the article, and as such have invaluable experiences useful in order to better understand the development of the Wikipedia article. With most edits being major, they are understood to be main content creators, and influencers.

2) Peripheral participants: editors who are found to be in the top 5 according to edit count, where most contributions are identified as minor edits. These are the individuals that have placed more time into polishing and fixing the article's grammar, presentation, and minor mistakes. These contributors have participated in the development of the article through

minor tasks but have still been present during its development for long periods of time. Their perspective as outsiders to the content creation over the ways in which the article is developed is a valuable differentiated point of view.

3) Multi-article editors. Several key individuals show very high participation across articles directly related to those under scrutiny, which indicate their high involvement on the topic of war and international conflict. They are part of a group of Wikipedians who contribute across multiple armed conflicts represented in the encyclopedia. Their ability to compare their experiences across different articles will be invaluable to this research.

4) Veterans. These are editors who have participated in the article from their inception to their current state. They have seen and monitored the different stages of development throughout the years of conflict and will be able to share their opinions and experiences with the whole process.

5) Retired contributors. These individuals have at one point participated strongly in the development of the article. However, they do not post any more in the article, indicated by the date of their last post, or they indicate that they do not participate in Wikipedia anymore by placing the “retired” or “semi-retired” tag on their personal talk page. The reasons for withdrawing from the studied article, or the Wikipedia community as a whole, can provide this research with important information on community and inter-editor relations, individual Wikipedian motivations and disagreements over the way the articles and the community should be run.

6) Administrators who have participated in the article. Among the contributors to the articles, there are some administrators who have had to deal with edit wars, content disputes, arbitrations, locking/unlocking the editing within the article. Their point of view

as caretakers will provide important information on the way in which conflict is experienced within the chosen articles on war and international conflict.

7) Rank and file editors: Individuals who show a noticeable number of contributions (around 10- 30) but that do not come close to be a highly influential figure within the editing community of a particular article. They are the editors whose contributions are judged by more prominent figures within article development, and who at times may seem as outsiders. Their point of view of the conflicts with editing and discussion may show a particular dimension.

4.4.2. Operationalization

The interview request includes disclosure on its purpose as an academic research from a reputable institution, an informed consent form and a participant information sheet, all of which are found in the annex. Furthermore, a general outline of the questions is provided for the sake of transparency, as it is not considered that knowing the general lines of questioning will affect the result in this case. This way, the interviewee will have a clear and comprehensive introduction to the research.

This research guide provides open questions which can shed light on the ways in which Wikipedians experience their involvement in editing and discussion of controversial Wikipedia articles, where the concept of Neutrality is not a given, and the possibility of hegemonic discourse is high. Depending on the answers that come out of the interview guide, probing, specifying and direct questions can be added. If the interviewee provides for example reasons for his or her interest in the article in which he or she participates, the interviewer may add a probing question such as: *you said earlier that you are interested in the article because of X, could you talk more about this?* If for example, an interviewee tells a story about a specific disagreement that happened during his or her contribution, a specifying question could be: *and what did you do then?* Direct questions can also help

understanding contributor motivations and perceptions regarding their involvement in the editing process of controversial articles. However, in order to refrain from leading the conversation, they should be left for last. It would be interesting however in order to understand contributor's point of view to obtain a direct answer from an interviewee by the end of the conversation from a direct question such as: *do you think the article is biased?*

Furthermore, the provided questions are open enough that they ensure that novel or unexpected themes may arise from the discussion with the interviewee. Different people may have different concerns and with their experience they can potentially highlight issues that have escaped the notice of the researcher during previous discursive analysis. The proposed questions are additionally relevant to the interviewees, as they participate themselves in this knowledge community and are generally interested on sharing their work and their experiences given that in theory all of them are voluntary contributors to the project. The conversation generated from this semi-structured interview reflects common issues that affect their own participation in the editing and discussion processes within the articles. Moreover, the guide questions are designed to elicit effective discussions and attempt to avoid the temptation of the interviewee answering "yes" or "no". Finally, by asking the guide questions in the manner in which the interviewee is a central point of the conversation, and avoiding talk in terms of the previous critical

discourse analysis, this semi-structured interview offers a real insight into the interviewee's point of view, in contraposition to the researcher's own frame of reference.

The interview guide includes the following questions:

First, introductory questions with simple answers that will help establish a connection between the interviewer and the interviewee.

- 1) How, why and when did you become interested in Wikipedia?
- 2) When have you first edited a Wikipedia article?
- 3) How long have you been a Wikipedian?
- 4) To how many articles have you contributed?
- 5) In a typical week, how much time do you spend editing on Wikipedia?
- 6) What is in your opinion Wikipedia's larger purpose and role in society?
- 7) What are the things that you like the most about Wikipedia?
- 8) And what are the things that you think are most problematic about Wikipedia?

Furthermore, open semi-structured questions designed to foster story-telling are introduced. These questions will attempt to directly address the second main aim of this dissertation, that is to understand how do Wikipedians experience their involvement in the discussion regarding controversial Wikipedia articles about ongoing armed conflicts. For this purpose, they are developed to promote conversation which can shed light on the research questions designed for this purpose, which are RQ3a: what is Wikipedia's role in society? RQ3b: How do Wikipedians interpret their participation in conflicts over content? And RQ3c: What are the concerns which Wikipedians have about the knowledge creation

process within controversial articles about armed conflict? The questions which will attempt to foster this conversation are as follows:

1) Tell me why you are interested in the article (name of article)? How important do you consider this article to be for society? What would happen to the article without your contributions?

2) With regards to this article, are there examples where you have observed edits or content that you consider problematic? Could you elaborate on these examples? In such cases, did you challenge the content? Why? How did you do that?

3) Do you know about examples where there was an edit conflict where good Wikipedia practice helped solve the dispute? Can you tell me more about it? What happened and how was the dispute solved?

4) Have you observed or been involved in cases where there were conflict resolutions that you did not agree with? What happened? Why did you disagree? Can you please tell me about a specific example?

5) Are there cases when Wikipedia content that you created was challenged? Can you give me an example? How did you feel when this content that you generated was challenged? How did you react? Have you observed that Wikipedians whose content is challenged get

upset or angry? Do they express such frustrations on Wikipedia? If so, how? Do you know of specific examples?

6) Can you tell me about good qualities found in fellow Wikipedians? Can you give examples? Can you tell me about bad qualities found in fellow Wikipedians? Can you give examples?

7) When there are disagreements, how and where do Wikipedia editors communicate about these disagreements? Can you give examples? What went well in these communication processes? What did not go so well in these discussions?

8) Can you please describe the general atmosphere present in discussions over content in this article?

9) Can you please describe the particularities of content disputes in these controversial articles about war and international conflicts in comparison to other types of articles?

10) Can you describe what kind of relationships do you have with fellow contributors from the same article?

11) (If the author retired from article/Wikipedia) What caused you to stop contributing to the article/Wikipedia? When did the moment come that you decided to stop? How did you feel before and after you stopped editing Wikipedia/article?

4.4.3. Research Ethics

In regards to extracted data from Wikipedia, while there are no major ethical issues in this research, several concerns should be addressed. This study used publicly visible and freely

available information in the open-content Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia. Accordingly, according to Eysenbach and Till (2001) analyzed edits, discussion and content are considered as belonging to the public domain. Due to its open source collaborative nature, Wikipedia articles, edits, the usernames of all registered contributors as well as the IP addresses of unregistered contributors could be openly read by anybody at any time. Therefore, the processes studied within this research did not occur within a private context. Furthermore, regarding interviewee data and in line with the requirements of the ethics committee of the University of Westminster, the dignity and the integrity of studied contributors were not violated in any way in this study. In order to protect contributors' privacy and to prevent their online identities from being easily traced, in every instance where a contributor's username appears within this thesis, it is replaced with an arbitrary but unique code number. An informed consent sheet and a participant information sheet can be found in the annex.

4.4.4. Data Collection

In order to inquire about the possibility of conducting a semi-structured interview with the desired Wikipedia contributors contact must be made. There are two ways: first, it is possible to leave a message on the talk-page of a Wikipedia user in order to draw their attention to an interview request. Another option is to e-mail the user with a built-in Wikipedia tool which allows users to send e-mails to each other privately without unveiling the IP address¹⁴. This method only works however when both the sender and the recipient have allowed user e-mails in their preference, something which is not always the case.

Wikipedia, even in its English version is a multi-cultural hub of anonymous and voluntary contributors. Therefore, the place of origin and residence of these contributors can be anywhere. For this reason, the interview must be conducted through online interview,

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Emailing_users

using videocall software like Skype or Google hangouts. Some contributors might lack a computer camera, and therefore the interview must be made only through voice-chat. The features of online voice-call are similar to those of telephone interviewing. On one hand, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004: 113) concluded that differences between given responses during face-to-face and telephone interviews were not remarkable, and that the quantity and depth was similar. On the other hand, Irvine et al. (2010) found that, interviewees tended to speak for longer periods of time during face-to-face interviews. Interestingly, Bryman (2012) explains that Irvine et al. also found differences in the behavior of the interviewer, who was more likely to vocalize responses such as “yeah” or “mm hm” in face-to-face conversations in order to convey that what was being said was understood. Additionally, in face-to-face format, questions were less likely to be grammatically correct, and on occasion they were not fully expressed before an answer was required. It is important therefore to put emphasis in supporting the interviewee with vocal assenting cues in order to communicate that the information provided is being properly received and understood. Finally, according to Bryman (2012) one of the significant drawbacks in telephone interviewing is that the observation of body language from the interviewee is impossible, and thereby such things as discomfort, puzzlement, or confusion are not easily discerned. Despite this, the online voice-call method can certainly produce the amount of detail required by qualitative researchers in their replies. As interviewees are dispersed throughout the world (especially in the case of Wikipedia), and taking into account saved time and travel costs, this method of interview is efficient and appropriate enough for the purpose of this research.

The data will be recorded and locally stored with OBS, an open source software which can be used for video recording and playback. It will capture the entire audio and video signal that goes through the computer screen during the live online interview. At any point in which connection breaks might occur, restarting the interview after technical difficulties of online connection are solved is a simple process.

5. Talk page analysis

Wikipedia is not just an encyclopedia. As seen along this dissertation, it is a complex phenomenon that can be understood as a thriving verbose community with the goal of providing free, open, universal knowledge. Due to the prevalence of edit disputes over content, the project is filled with discourse that directly affects the content and the knowledge creating processes it produces, as well as the supposed Neutrality or lack of thereof of the open encyclopedia project. Following the discourse model developed in the previous chapter, discourse sub-topics are collected and categorized based on the objects of deliberation by means of textual analysis of the fields of action, represented by three Wikipedia articles on armed conflict: War in Darfur, War in Donbass and Yemeni Civil War. This chapter will address the first aim of this dissertation regarding how conflict is represented through the editing and discussion of controversial Wikipedia articles about ongoing armed conflicts (aim 1), and two of its underlying research questions: RQ2a – which items related to Wikipedia are discussed during the editing process?; and RQ2b - what are the processes which Wikipedians use in order to legitimize their content? For this purpose, the behaviors and practices resulting from contributors' collaboration practices are highlighted and extracted from their participation in the deliberations over arising issues within knowledge-creation. Thus, Wikipedia's governance, its relation to its content, the legitimization and use of sources and the structural development of the studied articles is attempted to be seen through the practices performed during disputes amongst its participants.

5.1. Data Treatment

In order to achieve this purpose, for each deliberation found within the articles, I begin to ask three questions: what are the disputes about? How are disputes solved? How do Wikipedians participate in the disputes? It is easy to determine the object of deliberation as the issue at hand is usually present in the opening post under every talk page heading.

However, sometimes disputes evolve and switch emphasis from one deliberation object to another. Generally, response patterns (Kane et al. 2014) can be useful in order to highlight what object is constituted during the content creation process resulting from the deliberation. Furthermore, the end result of these deliberations and disputes is determined by the identification of power plays (Kriplean et al. 2007) which are used by Wikipedians in order to legitimize and protect their contributions. Moreover, the ways in which they interact with one another through linguistic and rhetorical means is looked at with the help of Wodak and Meyer's (2001) discursive strategies.

When this is established, the resulting Wikipedian practices highlighted from analyzed deliberations are looked at through grand theories of power and their impact in the knowledge creation process. Through Habermas' (1981) I proceed to interpret power relations within analyzed deliberations as a means for realization of goals, means of coercion, symbols of social status and power, decision-making authorities, power of definition, counter-power, organization and legitimization. Furthermore, I interpret whether power relations within are symmetric, that is, cooperative, inclusive, altruistic and with a direction towards shared goals, or on the contrary, asymmetric, that is, filled with sanctions, repressions and threats (Fuchs, 2015). If asymmetric power relations within the process of content creation resulting from contributor disputes is identified, I will look at whether hegemonic practices therein seem to be organic, in the sense that Wikipedians actively subject themselves to certain practices, or inorganic, meaning that there is a space for active resistance to be quenched by explicit mechanisms of coercion particular to the Wikipedia. Consequently, Giddens' (1985) understandings of administrative power which can influence the course of events that otherwise could be contested, and its impact over the accumulation of economic, political and cultural capital, together with Foucault's (1980) notion of counter-power and its potential for social change will be brought forth as

a lens through which to look at underlying Wikipedian practices resulting from this analysis.

Finally, following Wodak and Meyer's (2001) application of their discourse analysis approach, I will first provide a discourse critique with which I attempt to highlight contradictions in discursive practices between Wikipedia's goals and ideals and the developments of deliberations within highly contentious articles about current, ongoing, armed conflicts. Secondly I produce a socio-diagnostic critique which illustrates typical manipulative practices observed therein, and finally, a prognostic critique will attempt to improve communication practices among Wikipedians in order to potentially reduce the impact of asymmetrical power relations and achieve a closer approach to Wikipedia's ideal of the Neutral Point of View, and defend it against political agendas, propaganda and partisanship.

Regarding the research question RQ2a about which items related to Wikipedia are discussed during the editing process, the aim was to find whether there were certain common themes used as argumentation discursive practices within content disputes that could be extracted from editing discussions. However, when attempting such an analysis, there is always a danger for the researcher to code these items arbitrarily (Péry-Woodley, Scott, 2006). In an attempt to reduce this possibility, Van Dijk's (1977) idea of macro propositions is used. Macro propositions are semantic structures whose definition is established by "the global meanings, topics or themes" of several smaller pieces of discourse understood as micro-propositions. Van Dijk proposes to identify macro-propositions with a set of macro-rules which will depend on the data's characteristics. For the purpose of this research, macro-propositions are considered in to be the discursive practices in which Wikipedians participate regarding the process of content-creation

In Wikipedia talk pages, each thread is a consequence of a deliberation about a piece of content or an editing practice. The discussion underneath is the piece of text whose

propositions need to be extracted in order to proceed with the process of text analysis. For this reason, all text is saved into a .txt file in order to archive it within a specific timeframe, as Wikipedia's nature promotes daily changes in data. Based on the structure of presented information within the discursive field of action, the main macro-rule employed in this research for text treatment is "generalization", which is used for the purpose of "constructing a proposition that is conceptually more general" (Van Dijk, 2019, p47). The key to this macro-rule is that the macro-proposition obtained ignores variation between participants of the action and concentrates only on the fact. This feature allows us to look into Wikipedian practices as a structural aspect, rather than stemming from individual Wikipedian motivations. Thus, when Wikipedian practices regarding influence in content occur, they are often represented in the textual corpus under each deliberation and are easily identifiable. These practices repeat themselves along different discussions, different articles, and do so throughout time. In order to extract a relevant text, conversations are additionally treated through the deletion/selection macro-rules which "operate on all irrelevant details that do not contribute to the construction of a topic" (Van Dijk 2019, p47), allowing the researcher to easily address extracted macro-propositions. Archived text is treated in order to separate each deliberation in a separate text unit which is coded appropriately as the aforementioned discursive practices. In summary, the generalization rule was applied where possible, and furthermore, deletion/selection was used in order to clean-up the relevant pieces of information for each macro-proposition. Finally, it is important to note that macro-propositions can be established hierarchically on different levels (Kintsch, 2002, p158). In our case, macro-proposition can be found for different levels, such as the whole articles, the discussion page, each discussion thread or even each paragraph written within. For the purpose of this research, macro-propositions are constructed on the basis of practices which are repeated throughout time in all extracted discussions from the selected articles, as they show structural characteristics of how Wikipedia and its community deals with contentious information in articles about current, ongoing wars. In the analysis of the talk pages, examples of these practices are highlighted for each of the deliberation objects discussed within Wikipedia: governance, content, sources and structure which illustrate an approach to defining Wikipedian discourse topoi

used as argumentation discursive practices for the purpose of influencing content (see figure 17).

TOPOI OF WIKIPEDIA	
Common sense	If something is understood to be a common sense, one should adhere to it
Interpretation	If a policy can be interpreted in several ways, one should adapt it to suit the goal of the encyclopedia
Policy use	If a practice is perceived to be wrong, policy should be used to stop said practice If an attitude is perceived to be wrong, policy should be used to label the attitude as wrongdoing If a policy is perceived to be wrong, challenge the policy for the purpose of improving Wikipedia
Neutrality	If content is perceived to be biased, a breach of the NPoV must be invoked If content is perceived to be biased: ⇒ unbiased content must be supported ⇒ biased content must be challenged ⇒ its contributors must be labelled as such
Meaning	If definitions of content are perceived to be biased, challenge them
Naming	If nomenclature does not factually reflect the situation, change it
Inclusion / Exclusion	If content should not be present, remove it If content is missing in order to paint a full picture, add it
Clarity	If content is ambiguous, make it clear
Ambiguity	If content is disputed, make it ambiguous
Points of view	If one side is over-represented, add representation from the other side If sources are not official, they should be excluded If sources are official even if they are considered to be biased, include them If a source is perceived to be biased, exclude it
Partisanship	If content expresses partisan views, remove it If a source is perceived to be unreliable, exclude it
Professionalism	If sensationalist language is used, discard it
English language	If non-English language media is used, question it
Mainstream	If content is backed by mainstream media, accept it If points of view differ between mainstream and non-mainstream media, go with the former If a reference is not considered mainstream, question it
Scope	If content is outside of the scope of the topic, remove it

Figure 17: Wikipedia topoi

Additionally, word cloud and word count techniques are used as a support for previous text analysis as these techniques can be used to validate and help interpret findings (McNaught, Lam, 2010). Word clouds have been used analytically in different topics such as literature studies (Clement, Plaisant, Vuilemot, 2008), studies of public speeches (Dann, 2008) or education (Ramsden, Bate, 2008). McNaught and Lam (2010) further show that

these techniques can be useful in order to illustrate the frequency with which words are used in a selected text. This allows researchers to take a look at a partial representation of topics and themes present in the textual data under analysis. Additionally, a comparison of generated word clouds from various pieces of data may yield observable differences between them. First, the word cloud generating software removed common but non-important frequently used words such as “the”, “and” or “or”, removed numbers and performed a stemming function, which consists in reducing words to their root form. After a preliminary word count of the textual data, some changes to the text had to be made manually in order to improve the results. Direct mentions of Wikipedia usernames were removed from the word list in order to maintain their privacy within talk page participation and avoid from highlighting their roles in the conversation publicly in this dissertation. Then, words such as “UTC”, used as a time stamp in the conversation and “talk” which is used as a Wikipedia hyperlink handle which allows users direct access to other users’ personal talk pages were removed from the count as irrelevant. Then, several words were changed within the text in order to avoid confusion. For example, the “talk page” was converted into “talkpage” in order to differentiate it from the word “talk”; “comment added”, another Wikipedia handle which is automatically written after a Wikipedia posts a message was converted into “commentadded”; another word which was part of a prominent contributor’s username was changed in order to differentiate it from the Wikipedia. The resulting word clouds found in the next section (Figure 19,20,21) were generated from the top 200 words counted in the text for each article. Interpretation of these results will be discussed in the following sections.

5.2. Contextual Differences

All three analyzed articles feature similar results in regards to the discursive practices employed by Wikipedians during discussion within the talk page. In all of them, discursive practices involving content are a top priority, where the practice of deliberating over the

meaning of words and concepts which, as stated by Stvilia et al. (2005), is generally the most prominent activity.

As we can gather from comparing the charts above, there are two significant differences in the distributions of the objects of deliberation found within the analyzed articles. First, the discussion involving reliability and origin of sources and media is considerably lower in the War in Darfur article than in the Donbass and Yemen conflicts. This is first observed by a lower presence of discourse practices regarding the nature of sources (11% in Darfur in comparison with 17% and 22% for the Donbass and Yemeni conflicts respectively), and second by a considerably lower presence within the talk page textual corpus of words such as “sources”, “(un)reliable” or “rs” (abbreviation often used for “reliable source”). In both Donbass and Yemen articles, “source” is the most used word, and the second most mentioned topic accounting for the grouping of related words (such as the aforementioned “source”, “reliable” and “rs” being grouped into words regarding reliability of media) after the presence of participant actors within each conflict mentioned in the discussions (e.g. grouping “Russia”, “Russian”, “Ukraine”, “Ukrainian” as actors in the Donbass conflict

or grouping “Hadi”, “Houthi”, “Yemen”, “Saudi” as actors in the Yemeni Civil War conflict) (see figure 18).

War in Donbass			War in Darfur			War in Yemen		
	Text	Count		Text	Count		Text	Count
1	Source	1229	1	Darfur	344	1	Source	223
2	Russian	1095	2	Article	234	2	Article	170
3	Ukraine	985	3	Conflict	195	3	Stc	161
4	August	982	4	Genocide	157	4	War	149
5	War	981	5	War	141	5	Houthi	135
6	Article	970	6	Sudan	141	6	Hadi	127
7	Ukrainian	777	7	Arab	133	7	Yemen	125
8	Russia	639	8	Government	111	8	Saudi	120
9	One	573	9	Use	103	9	Al	112
10	Use	570	10	China	101	10	Support	104
11	Wp	495	11	Archive	97	11	Southern	100
12	July	435	12	Section	93	12	Governing	96
13	Reliable	410	13	More	91	13	State	96
14	More	391	14	Arm	90	14	Use	88
15	Support	383	15	One	90	15	Civil	84
16	September	367	16	New	86	16	Conflict	83
17	Conflict	366	17	Page	85	17	Claim	82
18	Donbass	353	18	Source	76	18	Movement	81
19	New	343	19	Sudanese	75	19	One	81
20	Time	330	20	Link	71	20	Wp	76

Figure 18: top word count tables

An interesting hypothesis resulting from this data could be that an African conflict such as the War in Darfur is considered to be peripheral in the scope of international relations, and thus Wikipedians question the reliability and goals of what they consider to be mainstream media less frequently. This is not so in the articles about Yemen and Donbass conflicts, where powerful Middle Eastern and Russian media groups vie for control of the public opinion with greater intensity by attempting to legitimize their own provided information through its presence in Wikipedia article content.

Regarding the main topic featured in each article, the word count and word clouds show us a general overview of issues of interest within the textual corpus of underlying

of Wikipedia (as seen in chapter 2) is one of the defining attributes of this open collaboration project. It is run by the collective policies, guidelines and essays that have been written and agreed upon through consensus throughout the early development of the project (Forte, Bruckman, 2008). These prior agreements upon the goals and the practices within the site hold power over the ways in which contributors discuss content, contribute together and communicate with each other (Kriplean et al., 2007). However, as the project continuously evolves and as new voluntary contributors gradually join and sometimes substitute the ranks of veteran Wikipedians, previous consensus constantly comes under scrutiny in relation to the context in which Wikipedia policies apply, as these new contributors bring with them new perspectives (Faraj et al. 2011). Furthermore, governance policies, guidelines and essays are ambiguous enough to allow for ample interpretation in regards to the many philosophical dilemmas in relation to the co-creation of knowledge (Matei, Dobrescu, 2011). In the following sections, examples from the textual corpus are brought forth which show the macro-propositions that represent the discursive practices Wikipedians engage with in their attempts to vie for the prevalence of their content.

5.1.1. Policy Interpretation

Contributors constantly use policy interpretation in order to defend their own content, or else, challenge content that they deem does not represent Wikipedia standards. Additionally, this interpretation practice plays a major role in conflict resolution processes (Forte, Bruckman, 2008). Due to the subjective nature of interpreting a policy, which, as we have seen in the Conflict in Wikipedia section (3.2) is often solved through the creation of ambiguous openly interpreted text (Matei, Dobrescu, 2011), it is difficult for disputing authors to agree upon specific definitions of policy. During strong content disputes, contributors will accuse each other of bad practice and cite policies to support their

arguments. Here, it is often the case that more experienced Wikipedians are able to more efficiently defend their content based on their expertise with Wikipedia rules and regulations (Preece, Schneiderman, 2009). Interestingly, disputing parties will often use the same policies in order to legitimize opposing arguments, as the key differences lie in interpretation of the regulation, rather than the definitions of the policies themselves (Matei, Dobrescu, 2010). Thus, disputing contributors will interpret a policy or guideline in order to suit their own needs, goals and content. Many Wikipedia policies are brought forth in this process of contention. Policies and guidelines are generally mentioned within the textual corpus as a hyperlinked abbreviation of its Wikipedia article preceded by the letters “wp”. This practice is mostly put in place by veteran Wikipedians who are proficient in Wikipedia jargon and regulation. The War in Donbass article featured 495 instances of policy reference, while in the War in Darfur article there were found to be very few references to policy comparatively (17 mentions). Additionally, there were 55 deliberation cases spread across all three articles where policy interpretation, that is, the practices of understanding and adapting policy meaning in order to suit another Wikipedian’s argument in an attempt to change or retain content. Below, I will illustrate some significant examples which show how or why this practice is represented during deliberations.

The first typical representation of the conflict among contributors is the **use of Wikipedia policy as an accusation of wrongdoing**. Wikipedians participate in this practice of policy **use** by implying that if an attitude is perceived to be wrong, policy should be used to label such attitude as disruptive. A good example is found during a big discussion over where in the Yemeni Civil War article’s infobox should the “Southern Movement” be placed. Here, the WP:IDHT guideline is brought forth (refusal to “get the point”). This guideline is a sub-heading of the Disrupting Editing behavioral guideline (WP:DE), which states that “in some cases, editors have perpetuated disputes by sticking to an allegation or viewpoint long after the consensus of the community has decided that moving on to other topics would be more productive.” (Wikipedia: Disruptive Editing, 2018). The behavioral guideline itself comes with a warning: “It is a generally accepted standard that editors should attempt to follow, though it is best treated with common sense, and occasional

exceptions may apply” (Wikipedia: Disruptive Editing, 2018). This statement, while it is written from a consensus **position of common sense**, opens the opportunity for disputes about the interpretation over when common sense is common and what qualifies to be an exception depending on context. It also illustrates one of the *topoi* highlighted within the argumentation discursive practice of Wikipedians: if something is understood to be **common sense**, one should adhere to it. During the aforementioned dispute, both warring editors interpret this policy differently, and attribute to each other the bad practice of disruptive editing, as exemplified in this extraction from their conversation:

Wikipedian A: “You suffer from WP:IDHT. I am simply describing a practice, that you'd enjoy to violate for reasons, you owe to explain. You've got enough examples of this practice, you can search further yourself. It's your burden to justify making a special exemption for exactly this conflict”

Wikipedian B response: “.... An it seems like your failing to understand WP:IDHT how can something that has been replaced since 2011 by the Popular Resistance be considered a "notable" sub unit... “

In these instances, contributors apply a predication strategy by labeling each other as biased by not adhering to Wikipedia guidelines. Additionally, an intensification discursive strategy is applied through the use of the action of “describing” a practice which Wikipedian A considers Wikipedian B to be violating.

The use of policy in order to protect content and attack disputing contributors is a common practice in disputes that get out of hand. In the next example, a dispute regarding the reliability of sources becomes personal between two users. Contributor A accuses with an intensification discursive strategy (“to me it seems”) that Contributor B, who is a productive participant, of questioning provided sources by claiming that

Contributor B does this for the sake of disputing, rather than fomenting rational conversation, thus labeling him through predication as a PoV pusher.

“To me, it seems like you're deleting WP:RS for the sake of battling against me, which is WP:DISRUPTIVE behavior. Lay down your hostile intentions, you're lowering the quality of the article”

Contributors A and B keep personally attacking each other while citing Wikipedia policies and guidelines in order to support their point of view. This is therefore found to be an example of **interpretation topos**, which implies that if a policy can be interpreted in ways, it should be adapted to suit the goal of the encyclopedia. Their discussion keeps on through perspectivation discursive practices in which they present their points of view in relation to each other. As the dispute goes out of hand with no resolution in sight and no rational discussion due to claims of misrepresentation of truth and illegitimacy of the sources, contributors C and D attempt to mediate in order to resolve the incident by nominating participants as potential PoV pushers:

Contributor C: “Even though ***** blocked Contributor A, I feel like this needs to go on the incidents section of the administrators noticeboard.”

Contributor D: “I revised the section header to 'Usability of sources like criticalthreats.org' so it would not sound like a personal attack on Contributor B. Please be aware that admins have broad authority under WP:GS to ban people from the topic of the Syrian Civil War if they don't seem to be able to edit neutrally. Anyone who continues to criticize individuals rather than trying to

accurately summarize the good sources could receive unwanted attention from admins. Thank you,

In another example, during a dispute over provided death toll figures in the Yemeni Civil War article, several policies and guidelines are used in **this accusative way** and thereby come under interpretative scrutiny. Due to the accusative way in which guidelines were used to challenge content, the Wikipedian taking the role of content retainer became agitated, thereby creating a heated discussion atmosphere. The Wikipedian assuming the role of content-changer positioned himself through perspectivization and brought forth the WP:Good Faith policy, which urges contributors to assume good faith over content edits, and questioned the good faith of the content-retainer (Wikipedia: Assume Good Faith, n.d.):

“There is no WP good faith existing that protects falsification of information. Instead of citing WP: Civil or WP: Good faith you should be grateful, if someone informs you when you are giving wrong figures. I never said, you are doing it intentionally. But it is too obvious that you proceed to misuse sources. Greetings”.

The content retainer defends the content by citing WP:CALC, which states that calculated numbers based on sources are acceptable (Wikipedia: No Original Research, n.d.). The

dispute continues with an argumentation strategy involving an interpretation topos by providing different interpretation of this guideline from the content-changer:

“WP: CALC does not back clear corruption of a UN death toll figure. And WP: Compromise does not help you when you purport a non-existing statistic. Don't use WP rules for improper usage of sources”.

The dispute affects directly the reliability of provided death toll figures, and both disputing contributors present different understandings on how this information should be presented. Both contributors **challenge the good faith of each other's edits** and argument, under the same understandings of what good faith means, but a misunderstanding of each other's point of view.

We see here three examples of policy interpretation used not only for the goal of maintaining or introducing desired content, but also for the purpose of accusation of wrongdoing from fellow contributors, who stop being considered collaborators and start being considered rivals. In the first two examples, disrupting Wikipedians accuse each other of participating in disruptive editing, a practice that is documented under a guideline of the same name. In the third example, the good faith guideline, one of the fundamental principles of Wikipedia (Reagle, 2008), is interpreted differently by disputing Wikipedians. In Habermasian terms, for both cases, interpretations of policy are explicitly used as a means for the realization of goals, that is, maintaining or defending content, and as a means for coercion, where contributors accuse each other of wrongdoing in an attempt to delegitimize their content and lower their status within the community. The framework provided by the aforementioned behavioral guidelines does not seem to solve the problem, and only the mediation of fellow deliberation facilitator manages to push the knowledge-creation process forward by refraining from explicitly attacking any contributor and searching for a compromise in the content. On the other hand, in these examples, where the reason for dispute is represented through different interpretations of the same

guidelines, all participating Wikipedians seem to have a voice, and content creation moves forward despite the dispute, thereby showing a manifestation of symmetrical power relations which on the surface are solely based on the ability of interpreting policy and finding an agreeable consensus through cooperation where contributors build upon the work of one another.

The topics under discussion in these examples which required policy interpretation were the nature and meaning of the Southern Movement, a political and paramilitary organization active in the Yemen Civil War conflict, and the reliability of a specific source used in the article: criticalthreats.org, a U.S. think tank which focuses on “threats posed by Tran and the global Al Qaeda network”¹⁵. The battle for meaning regarding the purpose and motivation of the Southern Movement in the Yemeni conflict is strongly reflected in Wikipedia struggle over content. The placement of the Southern Movement in the belligerent section of the article infobox carries strong political connotations because in a conflict of such complexity, regional, national, state and non-state alliances and allegiances are often unclear, variable and unreliable (Clausen, 2018), and thus, its categorization within the online encyclopedia has an impact on its international reputation. On its part, the dispute regarding the reliability of criticalthreats.org in particular and any other source in general due to interpretations of the reliability guideline carries the potential to influence content in the article and by extent censor or promote particular points of view. It is a dialectic battle which potentially influences accumulation of cultural capital by embedding specific ideologies within Wikipedia’s collaborative process of knowledge creation.

In summary, Wikipedia policy has an open nature which provides ample room for the collaboration process and prevents regulations from being too strict. This attribute seems to be a double-edged sword, as contributors will on occasion use their own interpretation

¹⁵ Criticalthreats.org/the-project

of policy in order to push their content and points of view forward, while seemingly adhering to Wikipedia rules.

5.1.2. Policy Enforcement

Indeed, as Wikipedia is found to be an extensively bureaucratic system, contributors use policy interpretation in order to participate in Wikipedia **policy enforcement** in an attempt to hold sway over the retention or change of content. This creates a specific dialectic where contributors wield against each other references to policies and guidelines with the goal to achieve their own ends, which might or might not be in the best interest of the development of the article from Wikipedia's Neutral Point of View. 42 instances were found within analyzed deliberations which focused on enforcing policy for the purpose of stopping certain editing practices.

In the Yemeni Civil War article, a vote is proposed to disregard state-owned media as a reliable source for war casualties. Independent of the supporting or opposing arguments during the vote, one contributor points out that this issue should not be voted on, and brings up the NOTAVOTE Wikipedia policy. "Addendum: This is WP:NOTAVOTE!". The WP:NOTAVOTE (Wikipedia: Polling is not a substitute for discussion, 2019) is an exploratory supplement to the Consensus and What Wikipedia is Not policies. It explains that Wikipedia works by building consensus and that when conflicts arise, they should be resolved through discussion, debate and collaboration, rather than polling. **Thus, policy is used in this deliberation to stop a specific practice** (the use of polling in order to make a decision) from occurring illustrating another argumentation topos regarding **policy use**, which implies that if a practice is perceived to be wrong, policy should be used in order to stop said practice.

It is understood that generally, Wikipedia policies respond to Wikipedian practices rather than guide them (Forte, Bruckman, 2008). However, in this case, a practice is thwarted by

imposition from policy in order to disrupt a proposal that can potentially influence article content, that is, the inclusion or exclusion of state-owned media as reliable sources for war casualty numbers. Generally, Wikipedians operate on good faith (Reagle, 2008), and their collaborative motives trump individualistic motivations (Prasarnphanich, Wagner, 2009). However, in this case the possibility of policy use in order to influence systemic bias in knowledge (Mendoza, 2009) exists. The particular motivations of Wikipedians participating in this deliberation is unknown, and even if most motivations are altruistic, with the specific goal of creating an open, free-access encyclopedia (Yang and Lai, 2009), anonymity and lack of transparency can be employed for political agendas (Santana, Weed, 2009), such as the exclusion of media belonging to states which have interests in the conflict. Nevertheless, enforcing Wikipedia policy in order to change-retain content is not necessarily bad, as the purpose of these regulations is to maintain order in the collaborative knowledge creation process. **Policies are put in place in order to prevent misbehaviors and bad practice by certain editors.** In this example, we see how a Wikipedian games the editing process in an attempt to prove personal bias towards him from another user,

and thereby gain favor for his arguments by labeling his opponent in the content dispute as a PoV pusher.

“I was the one who added Russian National Unity to the infobox in the first place, diff here [10], I merely removed them to see if [user] had an agenda by reverting me adding the Right Sector and not to my surprise, I was correct”.

These actions are immediately admonished by other participants in this discussion through the previously mentioned policy use argumentation under the grounds of -Do not disrupt Wikipedia to illustrate a point- policy, which render the user’s actions as disruptive tactics.

5.1.3. Policy Challenge

As contributors struggle for the power over content, Wikipedia governance practices come under scrutiny. Thus, on occasion, policies and guidelines are directly **challenged** and therefore they are sometimes not followed during the content creation practice. This practice illustrates another version of **policy use argumentation topoi**, which implies that if a policy is perceived to be wrong, it has to be challenged for the purpose of improving Wikipedia content. In this first example, one contributor sheds light on this issue by expressing his/her perspective during a dispute over the merits of Russia and North Korea presence as supporting factions for the Houthis in the Yemen Civil War article.

“Listen, the articles claiming the crazy conspiracy theories that somehow Russia or DPRK is "supporting" Yemenis are a joke. Also, you recently said that Republic of Korea somehow accused DPRK, well it didn't, if you haven't noted there is a logical fallacy in the article called Appeal to Anonymous Authority, i doesn't prove anything, says just some mysterious and unknown south korean official said that, the writer isn't notable in any department nor his article represents any investigative journalism, he likely just made it up cause he needed

to make money, many people nowadays make a living from fake articles. As you like to draw comparisons to article about Iran, I believe it doesn't belong in the list of belligerents either, but we need further consensus to remove it, since some pro-Saudi and anti-Iranian people may just pop it up in belligerents list again which would cause a string edits and reverts, nobody wants that. I have noticed similar behaviour in other articles, for example inclusion of Iran and Russia as belligerents in War in Afghanistan, I mean, seriously, there's some people in wikipedia which do not believe in WP:NPOV or WP:EXCEPTIONAL and just wanna smear and slander entire countries they simply don't like.”

The contributor shows his/her frustration over the knowledge co-creation process and the **lack of policy support on this issue**. The contributor uses several discursive strategies to solidify his argument. Predication is used to discredit the reliability of the source by labeling it as unreliable media (“he likely just made it up cause he needed to make money, many people nowadays make a living from fake articles”); it is also used to blame contributors with a perceived hidden agenda regarding middle-east geopolitics by labeling them as pro/anti[nation] (“but we need further consensus to remove it, since some pro-Saudi and anti-Iranian people may just pop it up in belligerents list again which would cause a string edits and reverts, nobody wants that.”); finally, the frustration is displayed by directly accusing groups of editors of rejecting Wikipedia policies which represent the encyclopedia’s values, thereby referencing them as outsiders from the Wikipedian group (“I mean, seriously, there's some people in wikipedia which do not believe in WP:NPOV or WP:EXCEPTIONAL and just wanna smear and slander entire countries they simply don't like.”).

While the interpretation of the NPoV can twist and adjust the policy in different ways in order to allow Wikipedians to vie for the prevalence of their content, the issue of direct disregard to its standards sheds light on the particularities of these types of articles, which are highly contentious and political. Motivations for such contributors are difficult to

discern, and their practices have to be observed through edit and discussion analysis of the Wikipedia, rather than interviews or questionnaires, as direct questions on participation motivations might not be reliable (Kvale, 1994). However, their influence in the knowledge creation process and relationships between contributors may be significant.

In the second example, in the War in Darfur article, contributors have challenged its “good article” status. According to several contributors, this article in which they participate does not meet the criteria necessary for this achievement. According to Wikipedia, anyone may nominate an article, and any uninvolved and registered user with sufficient knowledge and experience with Wikipedia content policies may review an article nominated at this page against the good article criteria (Wikipedia: Good article nominations, 2019). As the good article status was at some point awarded to the War in Darfur article, new participants have questioned this achievement:

“I’m likewise amazed that the article is on the "good" article” “I question this. [...] The article is also too long, and is too detailed about the different ethnic groups in the history-section; this information belongs rather to the Darfur article.”

“I also question the "good article" status, There is a huge gap in the background section to the current conflict.”

Good article status is a valuable achievement for any Wikipedia article. It means that the Wikipedia community certifies that the article meets the required criteria regarding verifiable information, accuracy, good prose, adherence to the NPoV, etc. For viewers of the online encyclopedia, such symbols evoke trust in the content (Lucassen, Schraagen, 2010). This status is obtained by community consensus achieved through a successful nomination process. However, a group of participants exemplified in the deliberation does not seem to be part of this consensus, meaning that despite the “good article” quality,

factual consensus was not reached, which raises questions regarding the conceptualization of consensus throughout other types of content creation processes. This is an example of inorganic hegemony, where decisions are reluctantly accepted by imposition, and little or no action is taken in order to change the situation.

Wikipedia has a set of policies and guidelines which were created ad-hoc by the community, in most cases prior to the time in which current contributors participate. Additionally, particular articles have their own sets of previous consensus practices which are enforced by more veteran contributors but which might be ignored by newer ones (Kriplean et al., 2007). It is natural therefore that not everyone that participates in the Wikipedia actually believes or supports rules which were set on precedents that were not experienced by the contemporary contributor. This is evident as well in the coding data which has shown only 19 instances of policy challenge within deliberations across articles, the smallest of all categories. Regulation challenge can be both positive and negative for the development of an article. On the one hand, previous discussions might be renewed every time there is a new crop of contributors and actual editing work may be slowed down, contributing to Wikipedian stress (Konieczny, 2018). On the other hand, old practices might not necessarily be the right ones today, and new contributors can bring new perspectives which are valuable for the improvement of Wikipedia information (Faraj et al., 2011). In Foucauldian terms, the practice of challenging Wikipedia policy corresponds to his understanding of challenging “regimes of truth” (Lorenzini, 2015) which are present in every society, and are dynamic and under constant negotiation. Wikipedia policy challenge practice forces the community to constantly justify and

reevaluate the meaning and importance of its policy or on the other hand adapt them to new community trends in order to maintain them as legitimate instruments of power.

5.1.4. Neutral Point of View

Finally, Wikipedia's Neutral Point of View policy is the philosophical cornerstone of the encyclopedia. Point of View **neutrality** is one of the most brought up, disputed and enforced policies within deliberations over content. As mentioned earlier, Matei and Dobrescu (2011) show that due to the epistemological and philosophical nature of neutrality, the NPoV policy is strictly unenforceable, leading to its constant re-interpretation during Wikipedia knowledge creation practices. Thus, on the basis of using the WP:NPoV policy to support arguments, constant disputes arise.

For example, a contributor created a deliberation in order to explain his or her changes in an attempt to avoid an edit war. Disputes regarding the new content were based on the assumption that the Neutral Point of View would be enforced as a result.

“Added "alleged" when referring to victims of US drone strikes. The US claims that the people killed are militants or Al-Qaeda members, but per Wikipedia policy we should not take government claims at face value. News media typically use "alleged" or "suspected" and so must we”.

Firstly, a discursive strategy which attempts to place participants in the Wikipedia in-group in order to legitimize a practice is used (“we”, Wikipedians, do this). However, his claim over the use of “alleged” is disputed with examples from media discussing war actions lacking this adjective, citing a breach of the NPoV policy. This shows an **argumentation topos of neutrality**, which implies that if content is perceived to be biased, a breach of the NPoV must be invoked. Within this discussion, the predication discursive strategy is used in order to support content by labeling the U.S. as an actor in the conflict, thereby

discrediting them as a source. The response to the editor's original deliberation is deconstructed in order to showcase his perceived position of partisanship.

“Alleged: The US government is claiming that the people it is killing are militants, with no independent confirmation. We cannot simply to take the government's claims at face value. If you want to clarify this wording (e.g. "alleged by the US government") feel free but treating these dubious claims as fact is a clear violation of WP:NPOV.

Targeted killings: Targeted killings is a non-neutral term used by the United States regime to justify state terrorism. Per WP:NPOV we should avoid this loaded term and use the factual term "assassinations" to describe the killings.”

Neutrality is thus constantly used in as a form of support or a form of challenge to content. From the above quoted claims, two more **neutrality argumentation topoi** are deduced. First, if content is perceived to be biased, unbiased content must be supported; second, if content is perceived to be biased, it must be challenged. A contributor starts a deliberation by challenging the neutrality of the article on the basis of his perception that the content is filled with “provocative language and unsourced claims”. A response dismisses the claim: “It is difficult to adjudicate whether there are WP:NPOV issues with the page when you provide no examples”.

Furthermore, **attacking another contributor by questioning his/her compromise with neutrality** is a powerful resource used by some contributors in their disputes. In this example, A revert dispute with two users over the reliability of provided sources becomes personal and shows a final argumentation strategy related to the **neutrality topoi**, - if content is perceived to be biased, its editors must be labeled as such. The accuser is threatened with a ban on claims of non-neutrality due to personal attacks towards a

prominent contributor by a dispute mediating user and a perspectivization discursive strategy which intends to place the Wikipedian as a mediating authority:

“I revised the section header to 'Usability of sources like criticalthreats.org' so it would not sound like a personal attack on Contributor **. Please be aware that admins have broad authority under WP:GS to ban people from the topic of the Syrian Civil War if they don't seem to be able to edit neutrally. Anyone who continues to criticize individuals rather than trying to accurately summarize the good sources could receive unwanted attention from admins. Thank you”.

This discourse attempts to set a precedent for linking personal attacks to non-neutral edits.

The examples we find here show that the NPoV discourse can be applied to the content and to contributor intentions as well. In the first instance we see how neutrality is used in order to change content with loaded meaning, highlighting several issues. First, Wikipedians disagree which term regarding death caused by U.S. troops is appropriate in order to denote neutrality in reporting the facts. Second, one of the arguments for the use of the term “alleged” is that it is used in media. Wikipedians generally adhere to standardized media style (Emigh, Herring, 2005), and this is used as an argument to attempt to change the meaning of content. In the second example shown, neutrality is used in order to question the commitment of a Wikipedian to the community’s goals, going against good faith policy. Thus, a particular interpretation of the NPoV is used to discredit fellow Wikipedians, rather than promoting search for consensus and a neutral perspective. This highlights the potential of Wikipedia rules and regulation interpretations to be used as means of coercion for the purpose of content legitimization. As shown by Preece and Schneiderman (2009), a thorough understanding of how the complex system of Wikipedia

rules and regulations is constructed and a masterful interpretation can be a powerful tool in order to maintain desired content in Wikipedia by committed actors.

In conclusion, the Neutral Point of View is the corner stone of Wikipedia. While the community as a whole generally attempts to bring neutrality to the articles, and deliberates on how this can be done best, the very nature of the term creates dilemmas which are often hard to solve. Ironically, the same term –neutrality- can be used disruptively in order to support content and at the same time in order to challenge it. Contributors accuse each other of breach of the Neutral Point of View and attempt to defend their own stance by claiming that their content, and no other, is the representation of the Neutral Point of View in the conflict. In terms of Habermas’ understandings of power, neutrality therefore works as a conduit for power within Wikipedia. The concept of the Neutral Point of View is used as a means for the realization of goals. Through epistemic interpretations of the NPoV policy, content is formed and adapted following ideals of participating Wikipedians, whether they are aligned with the goals of the encyclopedia or whether they respond to other agendas. Neutrality is used as a means of coercion, as Wikipedians accuse each other of its breach. Neutrality is a symbol of Wikipedia goals, being its most important and defining policy. To be accused of its breach is one of the most common occurrences during heated disputes over content in politically contentious articles (84 instances of NPoV challenge across the three articles). Furthermore, the NPoV is constantly used as a tool for organizing, legitimizing and challenging article content through the process of interpreting its application during the collaborative knowledge creation process. IT is found to be a central theme within any discussion related to contentious socio-political articles about war.

5.2. Wikipedian Struggle for Definition

Wikipedia, as a collaborative project dedicated to the co-creation of knowledge, naturally places importance into what content is found in its articles and why is it allowed to remain there. Issues that arise from definitions of terms and their meaning are the most common discursive practices found in the researched articles. Additionally, the naming of terms, the weight and importance of pieces of information and whether this information is clear or ambiguous are some of the discourse topics found within deliberations resulting from content disputes in Wikipedia.

5.2.1. *Meaning*

The **meaning** and definition of terms is one of the most important discussed topics (Stvilia et al. 2005). Data shows that battle for meaning within content is the most common discursive practice in which Wikipedians participate (136 instances throughout all article deliberations and the most discussed topic in all three articles independently). As seen in Wikipedia governance, interpretation of policy often determines how disputes are handled and which content remains on the main article page (Forte, Bruckman, 2008). The same is true for the interpretation of meaning and definitions of words and concepts represented by the **nouns and adjectives** that describe them. Typical issues of contention, especially in articles about war, can determine how to consider war casualties, what it means to support, aid, or participate within belligerent factions or how present information is textually framed in order to convey meaning. For example, in the Yemeni Civil War a dispute over the meaning of “Targeted killings” unfolds where the aforementioned term and “assassinations” are being interchanged. Both these terms are value-laden, and their permanence one way or another within article content carry strong underlying meaning on the actions of particular factions involved in the armed conflict, reinforcing or changing perceived values in society as Wikipedia users absorb the “encyclopedic” information present in the article content. In this conversation excerpt, an argumentation discursive

strategy of **meaning**, which implies that if definitions of content are perceived to be biased, content much be challenged, is used to justify a change in content. Additionally the United States is labeled through the predication discursive strategy as a regime that justifies state terrorism in order to discredit the content, and through the referential discursive strategy participants in the conversation are included in the Wikipedia in-group by the actionym of “we avoid loaded terms and use factual terms”:

“targeted killings is a non-neutral term used by the United States regime to justify state terrorism. Per WP:NPOV we should avoid this loaded term and use the factual term "assassinations" to describe the killings”.

An objection regarding the use of “largest source by far”, where “by far” does not seem to be supported by enough data to be qualified in such manner. A contributor seems surprised at the notion that such element has been present for a long period of time: “I've removed that phrase. It was clearly an unsourced POV, which inexplicably remained in the lead for months.” Consequently, a discussion over what it means to “support” and what it means to be “involved” unfolds, while discursive strategies of predication which label the US as supporters or not to Saudi Arabia occur:

Contributor A – “The article says that the US conducts only airstrikes against al Qaeda while worldwide press reported on multiple occasions that the US also gives intel to the Saudis on Huthis”.

Contributor B – “Yes, the US provides intel to the Saudi-led Coalition on the Houthis, but that isn't really a full military intervention. The US is still airstriking

al-Qaeda, and they will probably start targeting ISIL as well, if they haven't yet already”.

Contributor C – “I believe this is still "support", rather than "involvement””.

There are significant implied differences for public opinion among readers of Wikipedia resulting from the United States to be understood by the encyclopedia to be involved in the war or not, and it is of geo-political interest from different involved powers to vie for content one way or another in an attempt to reinforce or gain authority through “power of definition” (Habermas, 1986) within encyclopedic content, rendering great importance to argumentation strategies involving meaning topoi, couples with the labeling of the U.S. as one type of actor or another.

Another socio-politically important struggle for definition where the meaning topoi is featured is found in the War in Darfur article, where deliberations arise about the understanding of whether the conflict can be considered genocide or not (the word genocide being mentioned 157 times, placing it as the 4th most mentioned word). Contributors note that there is a discrepancy between understanding the conflict as “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” and “competition between sedentary farmers and nomadic cattle-herders who compete for scarce resources.” At the same time, contributors propose that the media has been sensationalizing the conflict as a racial war and this is illustrated in the article, a one Wikipedia notes:

“Note that both sides are largely black in skin tone, and the distinction between "Arab" and "non-Arab" common in western media is heavily disputed by many

people, including the Sudanese government. Moreover, these labels have been criticized for sensationalizing the conflict into one of racial motivations”.

Here, nomination discursive strategy is used to define warring groups on the basis of ethnicity and color. Contributors point out as well the discrepancies between the U.S. Government classifying the event as qualifiable for genocide, while the United Nations has been refraining to do so. Thus, the deliberation on the conflict described as genocide or not becomes a part of a constant conflict between contributors inside the article. The issue keeps being brought back by new contributors who attempt to include genocide in the title. However, previous consensus remains strong in order to find a NPoV, that according to some might be detrimental for the veracity of information. At the time in which the article was named Darfur Conflict, a contributor brought the genocide proposition again with the help of an intensification discursive strategy:

“I think it's definitely a crisis or genocide, but not a conflict. I was surprised, and somewhat upset, when I found this page had such a subdued name. This issue is a lot more crucial than its title makes it seem.”

The proposition is again pulled back on the basis of NPoV and previous consensus and neutrality topoi argumentation:

“The name was probably chosen for NPOV. I did a google search on the name, Darfur conflict 599,000 hits, Darfur crisis 579,000, Darfur genocide 500,000. So they are all in wide use. Since no one on an official capacity is willing to call it a genocide, I think we should probably stick with the name as is for now.”

Indeed, Mazur and Vollhardt (2016) write that as cases of mass violence are represented according to definitions of genocide, more people react and remember them. These

responses, in turn, pressure governments for actions in the form of policy aimed at prevention of such violence. Framing cases of mass-violence as genocide, dictates how they are discussed and acted upon within political and public spheres. It is therefore of great interest to affected populations, communities, ethnicities or nations to frame armed conflicts in which they were involved as genocide in search for public support. However, without official recognition from transnational organizations such as the United Nations, experienced Wikipedia contributors will attempt to avoid placing specific nouns or adjectives such as genocide as descriptors. Words such as assassination or murder, civil war or proxy war, rebels, separatists or insurgents carry political meaning which will inevitably create disruption and dispute within the knowledge creation process. In this sense, Wikipedia knowledge depends on the power of institutions in order to legitimize their content, and depending on who has the resources necessary to enforce their objectives; they might be advantageous for some communities, but work in detriment of others (Moe, 2005).

5.2.2. *Naming*

However, not always is the **naming** of concepts, attributes, adjectives, titles, headings, factions, etc., unavoidable. This often creates deliberations among contributors in an attempt to improve the information within the article. The aforementioned dispute on whether the term “assassinations” or “targeted killings” should be used is an obvious example which carries different connotations. One of the main items of contention, where the discourse topic of naming is manifested is the **dispute over article titles**. From this, an argumentation topos on **naming** arises, which implies that if nomenclature does not factually reflect the situation, change it. Multiple requests for title change occur throughout all the development of the articles on war. As the conflicts evolve, general understandings on whether they are civil wars, regional wars, war for independence or international conflicts are present. This is reflected by the constant struggle of conflict definition by appropriating the name of the article. Thus, the Yemeni Civil War, War in Donbass and

the War in Darfur articles have undergone multiple name changing requests for the title of article, titles of article sections and nomenclature of combatants. For instance, renaming the title by removing the “civil war” in the Yemen Civil War article is proposed by an unregistered user, citing the involvement of direct external parties (there were 7 different instances of the “naming” discourse topic in the Yemeni Civil War article). The disputing contributors argue that “The presence of foreign troops does not change the identification of this conflict as a civil war. Se Spanish Civil War or Syrian Civil War as an example” and maintain the title based on the practice on other pages by previous consensus power play (Kriplean et al. 2007).

Kriplean’s definition of the “practice on other pages” power play seems to be a powerful argument for the prevalence of content. On another instance where an unregistered user proposes changing the title of the article to Second Yemeni Civil War, with the help of perspectivization discursive strategy, a Wikipedian places himself as a representative of Wikipedian practice, and the proposal is dismissed on the grounds of the meaning of “second” and previous practice in other articles:

“Typically on Wikipedia, when a conflict is named the "Second" of an earlier one, there is a direct similarity; i.e. the Second Congo War happened because of the aftermath of the First Congo War. A conflict might also be named "Second" of an earlier one if historians reach a consensus and commonly refer to it as such, i.e. World War Two and Second Sino-Japanese War. Because the two Yemeni civil wars are not directly (or closely) related to each other in terms of cause and effect, and because the current conflict is not commonly called the "Second Yemeni Civil War", it has not been named such, as Wikipedia would be creating a new title for the conflict.”

The War in Darfur also had several name change discussions (20 instances of the naming discourse topic in the article). First, a proposition to move the title to “Genocide in Darfur”

was unanimously opposed by participating contributors. The argument for the proposed change claimed that

“A genocide is occurring in Darfur that has claimed 400,000 lives and has misplaced over 2 and a half million people, according to numerous sources online. A war is different than a genocide. The definition of war is the waging of armed conflict against an enemy. The definition of genocide is the systematic killing of a racial or cultural group, which is occurring in Darfur.”

This proposition was dismissed, but contributors accepted that genocide was part of the war in Darfur but that “The genocide is just one aspect of the war” and thus it was not necessary to change the title. Additionally, in a Wikipedian generative response (Kane et al. 2014) fashion, one contributor with the aid of intensification discursive strategy by use of modal verbs incited the proponent of the change to expand on the notion of genocide within the article:

“Oppose but recognising that there is a lot of potential to expand the article, including the possibility of a section specifically on the genocide. The proposer might find it productive to work on a subsection specifically on the genocide that could in future be spun out into a separate article once it has matured. This would be a great way for you to improve wikipedia's coverage in an area you care about.”

This type of deliberation helps with the proactive improvement of an article, giving encouragement for further participation and expansion. A second instance of name change proposed a move toward “Darfur Crisis” or “Darfur Conflict” and again to “Darfur Genocide”, thereby eliminating the word “War” from the title. The argument for the move was that Crisis or Conflict were adjectives used twice as much as War in Google Scholar searches on the topic, and thus “Given [...] the vastly greater English-language use of

"Darfur Crisis", let's move this to where everyone is already looking for it". "Darfur Genocide" was rejected on the basis of previous consensus power play, and consensus was not reached on the other two options due to "pragmatic" reasons as explained by this contributor: "'War' is a pragmatic usage. I am not convinced there is a common name for the issue and think looking for one will not help us figure this out." In the end, consensus was not reached as illustrated in the following comment: "There was a clear consensus against the original proposed move, which is sufficient reason to close this discussion. After nearly two months, there was no consensus formed in favor of any alternative proposal either." Practices here show that Wikipedia is not about voting but about forming consensus in order to improve an article. If a change is not accepted by all participating parties, it is generally safer to leave it as it was, in a state of previous consensus.

On several occasions the naming discourse topic has been ignored by the community. In these examples, contributors have complained about certain choice of words that they regarded as inappropriate, only to be disregarded through lack of content change and discussion engagement. In the first example, a contributor posts in the talk page disputing that "Saudi-led coalition" in the belligerents section is wrong, because according to him "the coalition is led by British and US forces," which is evidenced by Western drones spotting targets for Saudi pilots. No source is given and the comment is simply ignored by the community. In the second example, another contributor complains about the article being biased with strong language and the labeling by predication strategy of Wikipedia as a biased information environment, and labeling the U.S as a supporter of Saudi Arabia. His comment is ignored.

"Like most Wiki articles of a political nature, this article is yet another stinking pile of bullshit and misinformation: if you look at the chart on the right column which is supposed to show who is fighting whom, the USA is nowhere to be seen! But it is a fact that the US military is providing logistical support, spotting, tracking, refueling Saudi war planes in the sky over Yemen, and also selling

billions of dollars of ordinance and weapons to the Saudis to use in this conflict. The USA should most definitely be included as a belligerent fighting with the Saudis against the Houthis. To leave the USA out as this article does is disgraceful propaganda. Utterly sickening.”

These two last examples were codified as “naming” discourse topics. However, the resolution process has more to do with Wikipedian behaviors in addressing disruptive contributions. As seen in the interview analysis chapter, when comments within the topic do not imply an edit war that would affect knowledge production, they are simply ignored. If such deliberations affect content disruptively through editing activities, Wikipedians persistently revert edits and apply policy enforcement in order to maintain the collaboration process in order. One interviewed Wikipedian identifies this practice as “persistence”:

“If you are persistent in saying, well this is what Wikipedia policy says, this is what we should do, and you keep following the article, then eventually the people that are making all of uproar kind of fall away on the cord. It’s not a kind of resolution, it is simply kind of gradual process of silencing of people”

In any case, not only the title of the article is found to be under scrutiny. In the context of war, naming belligerents is a meaning-laden term which may change the way people think about factions in conflict and what they represent. Traditionally, news media already plays an important role in the framing of conflicts, catering to the geo-political interests of its editorial line and political leanings (Maslog, 2007). Different newspapers have promoted different particular frames of the Ukrainian conflict which has legitimized foreign policy in national actors and helped build a common geo-political rationality (Ojalla, Pantti, 2017). Wikipedia, in its role of encyclopedia is forced to choose which frames to feature in their articles while attempting to maintain a Neutral Point of View. Consequently, in the War in Donbass article, a deliberation arose about how Eastern Ukrainian combatants

should be named: insurgents, separatists or rebels, terms which were mentioned within the article according to the world cloud analysis a total of 279, 202 and 241 times respectively. Contributors attributed their own understandings to each word and their understandings of what should be included in the Wikipedia article. One contributor decided that one terminology was more politically imbued than another with the help of argumentation discursive strategies and uses of naming and meaning topoi:

“"Separatist" is a political statement, whereas "insurgent" is merely a description of their actions. Therefore, regardless of whether they are "separatist" or not, they are still insurgents”.

On the other hand, two contributors had a very opposite understanding of the word “rebel” through the argumentation discursive strategy with which they attempted to justify the positive or negative attributions to the word:

“"Rebels' has been used in the English language press for more than a decade as a loaded term denoting a negative perspective" (*Contributor A*).

“sorry, what? It seems to me like it's the exact opposite. "Rebel" is a *positive* term in English, particularly in the US.” (*Contributor B*)”

Indeed, precisely naming a concept may be a challenge, not only due to political issues which consider factions differently, but also due to different personal or cultural understandings of certain terminologies (in this case the word “rebel”), and Wikipedia’s clear bias towards Western culture represented towards its uneven geography of participation leaning towards the English language (Graham, 2015).

On the other hand, **naming may also serve to resolve disputes**. A big content dispute (described in the following section 5.2.3), in which contributors did not maintain good

manners, unfolded over the way in which the “Southern Movement” was shown in the belligerents’ infobox. The dispute was solved by changing the name of the factions to a point in which disputing contributors could not maintain the argument (see figure 22).



Figure 22: February 2007 edit which solved the content dispute.

5.2.3. Clarity/ambiguity

Deliberations over the ambiguous nature of consensus within Wikipedia bring up several further questions which contributors have to confront in order to create content suitable for articles of such contention. Should information be clear and precise? Should information

be ambiguous and open to interpretation? Should distinguishable or precise information be prioritized? Is readability or accessibility to information more important?

We have seen throughout the literature review and methodology chapter how ambiguity is found to be one of the key concepts which help content dispute resolution and push the collaborative knowledge creation process forward (Matei, Dobrescu, 2011). However, in some cases, reaching consensus through ambiguity is fought against by Wikipedians who do not accept a lack of clarity in an article's description of a particular issue that they find important. Ambiguity has the power to bring together different perspectives under the same framework by allowing participants to engage in personal interpretations of the knowledge building process, thereby contributing to consensus building. However, this may produce internal contradictions when practices, agreements and goals become reinterpreted cyclically by the very nature of a consensus established through ambiguity (Abdallah, Langley, 2013). Thus, in the knowledge co-creation process within Wikipedia articles about current, ongoing wars, a **clarity/ambiguity** dialectic (a dichotomy between clarity of information or consensus by ambiguity) is found, which responds to the requests for clear and unambiguous information by some Wikipedians who do not consider that a more open stance can be taken on complex controversial topics. Other Wikipedians accept that ambiguity in some types of information is a way forward in order to avoid constant edit wars and disagreements, as it shown to be the case in Matei and Dobrescu (2011).

As mentioned earlier in the naming topic section, a big dispute over the way in which the Southern Movement, an actor in the Yemeni Civil War, is included or excluded into the infobox. From this claim, we can extract **inclusion/exclusion argumentation topoi** which imply that if content should not be present, it should be removed, and conversely, if content is missing in order to paint a full picture of information, add it. Through an argumentation discursive strategy involving an **ambiguity topoi**, which implies that if content is disputed, it should be made ambiguous, this dispute is resolved by a third Wikipedian with the use of an edit which assigns an ambiguous name to the belligerent faction and forces editing

opponents to compromise while using an intensification discursive strategy (“I feel too lazy to correct your factual inaccuracies”, “you are in a tantrum”) in order to discredit a point of view.

Third Party Contributor A: “I feel too lazy to correct your factual inaccuracies regarding the SM, especially when you're in such a tantrum. So take a look at the infobox now, this ought to be a sound compromise.”

Warring Contributor A: “If it will be called the southern resistance and remove the other two subunits then that is a fair compromise as it meets mine and his concerns. Now it is just about him agreeing to the compromise so this topic can be settled.”

Warring Contributor B: “Well, it's ok now.”

Third Party Contributor B: “Well I think that a fair compromise has been reached and as long as both parties well not engage in edit war on this topic it is safe to close this debate.”

On the other hand, **the need for information clarification** is an important topic to many contributors. A dispute arises over the use of civilian casualties' figures in the Yemeni Civil War article. A prominent user cited a secondary source which provided a reference to official UN figures which claimed 3.261 deaths, around half of them civilians. This

contributor proceeded to quote 1630 civilian deaths based on this reference. His claim was challenged:

“Even if it was saying "3,261" "around half of them" wouldn't mean "1,630".
You give a special, a specified number, where your source does not do.”

The dispute here arises on whether it is reliable to perform an own calculated statement of civilian death toll based on “around half”, rather than an official figure. From this claim, a argumentation strategy using a **clarity topos** is unraveled, which implies that if content is ambiguous, make it clear. A discourse battle between the need to clarify information and the need to provide a figure is unresolved. It seemed that in the case for casualty figures, a Wikipedia contributor would not accept “rounding-up” the number for compromise, and was blatantly against using unspecific figures of civilian casualties conforming to “about half” of the provided number of total deaths.

Related to the dichotomy of clarity vs ambiguity, we find a deliberation regarding **distinguishability vs preciseness** in reference to what kind of information should be contained in the infobox. When one contributor means to split a general belligerent faction in the Yemeni Civil War into two more specific ones, the edit gets reverted and a dispute ensues. The dispute deals on Wikipedia practice in regards to how much information should be shown in the infobox and how specific should it be, for encyclopedia purposes. Contributors realize this is a matter of finding a balance between specifying and generalizing information while taking into account the audience, ease of information navigation and the reliability of information where that same information is hard to clarify given the situation of war. One of the participating contributors elaborates on the topic of

this revert through a perspectivization discursive strategy which attempts to reduce the intensity of the dispute and position his point of view in neutral ground:

“It's simple the infobox is meant to give the reader a basic idea of the belligerents participating, your edit is just basically taking the original and making it more complicated.” “ I actually don't have any problems with adding GPC elements that are now apart of the Houthi movement, our disagreement, at it's most basic level is distinguishability vs preciseness.”

Readability and accessibility to the content is another issue brought by contributors while building the articles. Often, Wikipedians do a thorough job at accumulating information of value. However, it can create articles full of disconnected pieces of information and trivia without proper summarizations of the ongoing issues. In the War in Darfur article, a request for an explanation of the causes of conflict poses this very issue to the community of contributors. A participant describes it as follows:

Excellent idea. I came to the talk page after trying to extract the main causes of the conflict from the article, a task that is extremely frustrating due to the complete lack of a proper "executive summary" on the conflict that includes concise discussion of near and longer term causes and current maintaining factors, like lack of effective international action.

Instead, the article is full of information of only tangential importance to readers like me who are interested in obtaining a fundamental grasp of the conflict (that is, it is about as accessible as a difficult classical history text, the kind that only historians seem to enjoy). While realizing that oversimplification is a folly, the article makes zero attempt at simplifying in so far as it facilitates understanding. I'm likewise amazed that the article is on the "good" article list for these reasons. Most people coming to the article probably won't want to spent thirty minutes

digesting and analyzing all the data here, although it is, of course, commendable that all these facts have been brought together by wikipedians. Now make them accessible, please!

Thus, some issues within the collaboration process are not clear and are only solvable on a case-by-case basis depending on the argumentative merits of each party. Clarity vs ambiguity, distinguishability vs preciseness, readability vs accessibility are all dilemmas which contributors have to face and on which they have to find consensus on their own, without the aid of Wikipedia policy.

5.2.4. *Due/undue Weight*

Finally, in discussions over content, the topic of **due/undue weight**, revolving around the WP:UNDUE policy clarification which intends to help in pursuing Wikipedia Neutral Point of View and states that “Neutrality requires that each article or other page in the mainspace fairly represent all significant viewpoints that have been published by reliable sources, in proportion to the prominence of each viewpoint in the published, reliable sources” (Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View, n.d.), and it clarifies that “giving due weight and avoiding giving undue weight means that articles should not give minority views or aspects as much of or as detailed a description as more widely held views or widely supported aspects”. Determining precisely **who is considered a minority and what is considered to be a minority** point of view is not the most prominent (35 instances of due/undue weight deliberations across all three articles), but one of the most impactful discourse topics found in Wikipedia conflict over content. Avoiding tyrannies of minorities is a major concern for online communities (Farrell, Schwartzburg, 2008), as this may produce a systemic bias of knowledge (Mendoza, 2009) and a rise of elitism and Wikipedia bourgeoisie (Kittur et al. 2007). However, proper application of due/undue weight policy might also provide knowledge other than from an expert-oriented perspective (Rodriguez, 2007) and challenge traditional approaches to credibility

(Magnus, 2009). From the perspective of articles about war, this is directly applied to information stemming from belligerent factions and their supporters and detractors who vie for Wikipedia content and its legitimacy. For example, the inclusion or exclusion of ISIL as a belligerent faction in the Yemeni Civil War article is a matter of contention. As edits begin to include ISIL into the infobox because according to sources they have “claimed” authorship in one attack, this notion is regarded by disputing contributors as undue weight, a stance that would warrant its exclusion, with the help of a predication discursive strategy which labels ISIL in terms of its participation or lack of thereof in the conflict. One contributor comments with an argumentation strategy involving the exclusion/inclusion topos:

“It's completely unnecessary. ISIL has claimed (not even necessarily made) one attack that could be considered part of this conflict. It controls no territory in Yemen. It has not been a target of the Saudi air campaign. Giving it its own infobox column is WP:UNDUE and makes the page look unnecessarily messy.”

In this deliberation, throughout the content dispute a contributor uses referential discursive practice in order to validate his claim by pointing out that he is a select member whose voice has been listened when discussing general Wikipedia organization, and an intensification discursive strategy in order to emphasize his utterance (“strongly believe”), specifically in regards to the issue at hand:

“As one of the editors who actually got Wikipedia to allow 4+ column infoboxes in the first place, I strongly believe they should only be used when it is absolutely needed to convey the dynamics of this conflict.”

Some issues with the perceived neutrality and due/undue weight of information are accepted and changed by the community of contributors. For example, a request for the removal of a line which states “Education one of the basic human rights in United Nation.

It is not fair the Yemen's children be deprived their opportunity of education due to civil war." is accepted due to it being biased and non-informative.

Additionally, a common conflict amongst the contributors is the notion of **what information should be included**. Within highly politicized conflicts such as a current ongoing war, the importance of giving due/undue weight to particular information may be an important battle ground for political and ideological actors. For example, in the War in Donbass article, an edit labeled through a referential strategy the U.S. Government as an actor supporting the Ukrainian Government in the conflict. A deliberation with several unsigned contributors supporting the notion of U.S. Government involvement developed into a debate more common to political forums than the discussion board of an encyclopedia. Conjectures and opinions were prevalent over methodical accumulation and dissemination of information. This excerpt from one of the unsigned participants in the deliberation illustrates a discourse which does not contribute to the building of an encyclopedia, but contributes to the creation of discussion among participants, complete with predication labeling of political actors such as the LDPR being “nationalistic”, and “pro-Russian”, the U.S as a “supporter” or Ukraine, American citizens to be ignorant (“Americans can't even find Ukraine on a map”).

“True that. Don't forget, the nationalistic LDPR, of mainstream Russian politics, is an active backer of pro Russia folks, not only in non lethal supplies such as the ones that the US provides to Ukraine, but also lethal supplies. Let's also not forget that, back in 2009, some half of Russians held negative view of Ukraine. Back in 2012 when Yanukovich was in power, a quarter of Russians held negative view of Ukraine. Now? I would say at least 90% of Russians hold negative view of Ukraine. And that translates to a LOT of backing to pro Russia folks. I would say at least 90% of Americans can't even find Ukraine on a map. The US government backs Ukraine, but the American people do not. As you can see, the difference

between Russian support to pro Russia folks and American support to Ukraine is huge.”

In conclusion, content and its underlying meaning, definitions, relative importance and prioritization, its clarity and its ambiguity are the main discursive topics over which Wikipedians deliberate. It is the most important feature in Wikipedia which influences social perceptions about subjects of socio-political importance, making it the main resource that can provide cultural capital to those who control it. While Wikipedia policy and structure influence content, achieving the power of definition over what content remains and which content is discarded is the ultimate goal for participants in the collaboration process of Wikipedia. While there are certainly dangers of these participants being placed agents by organizations with specific agendas, it is much more likely that they are mere representatives of their political beliefs directed by their own ideologies who produce and reproduce their particular discourses. As individuals search for information online and end up in Wikipedia, all of these struggles over information remain invisible, creating a possibility for maintaining and reproducing organic hegemony (Howarth, 2010) by gently steering content in a desired direction within Wikipedia’s collaborative creation process.

5. 3. Wikipedian Legitimization of Media

According to Chomsky (1997), mainstream media refers to large mass media corporations which shape and reproduce dominant currents of thought. Media constructs reality, and thus, powerful actors spend their resources in advancing their interests by imposing agendas and content framing on audiences through the control of media organizations (Entman, 2007). Wikipedia’s goal of becoming a universal free-access portal to knowledge requires reliability and validity which is provided precisely by traditional media in order to become a legitimate source for encyclopedic knowledge. Thus, discourse topics

regarding the nature, origin and agendas of sources within editing and discussion of controversial topics are common.

5.3.1. Mainstream Media

One common topic under discussion found in deliberations within the textual corpus is determining what is considered **mainstream** media and on what grounds should its information be considered reliable. The word “mainstream” is found on 36 occasions within the analyzed textual corpus and 32 instances of discussion over this topic have been coded. In the English-speaking Wikipedia, most sources are considered reliable when they are understood as being mainstream, as opposed to what is perceived to be “alternative” media. Discussions over what types of media have the necessary appropriate journalistic practices and lack of bias are constant. Through the practice of limiting which sources can be considered mainstream and which are not, power struggles and hegemonic practices manifest. For example, the reliability of Russia Today news media is one of the most prominent cases under scrutiny. Russian Today, otherwise commonly known as RT is one of the most used sources from Russian media in the War in Donbass article. However, it has developed a bad reputation among Wikipedia contributors and Western society alike, and it is a matter of controversy (Yablokov, 2015). A lengthy discussion over the reliability of Russia Today¹⁶ was eventually closed and determined to be inconclusive, with the following header explaining the futile situation of the deliberation to future potential

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Noticeboard/Archive_173#Russia_Today

readers and highlighting an argumentation strategy **topos of point of view**, which implies that if a source is perceived to be biased, it should be excluded:

“No consensus that RT is or is not reliable for general purposes. If someone has a specific claim RT is trying to make about a specific article, they are welcome to request a discussion again, but otherwise this was a giant waste of time.”

Ultimately, it is up to the collaborating community to determine the merits and reliability of each source according to its context. This, in turn, increases the influence that individual contributors have on the outcomes of articles, as the sources used depend on the power of contributors to convince their collaborating peers in search for consensus.

Another example of this conflict among collaborators can be found in a preoccupation regarding the citation of a Veterans Today article which, in the opinion of a contributor, is filled with holocaust denial and conspiratorial theories shows interesting dynamics as well as a predication discursive strategy which labels Israel as actor which is not involved in the conflict, and a referential discursive strategy which defines a contributor as a PoV pusher.

“Unless claims of Israeli involvement can be backed by **serious, mainstream sources**, please stick it with your personal agenda and refrain from inserting them anywhere on Wikipedia.”

In this same discussion, a practice of intensification is used by another user who decides to add Turkey with a referential discursive strategy in the conversation: “This is very problematic all across Wikipedia - mainly concerning Israel and to some degree Turkey” Thus, the attribute of sources being mainstream is used by contributors to reduce the cultural capital of discursive opponents illustrating another **argumentation topos**

mainstream media which implies that if points of view differ between mainstream and non-mainstream media, go with the former.

On the other hand, **applying the “mainstream” attribute to a source is also used in order to legitimize content**. A contributor attempts to defend its content regarding Russian and North Korean involvement in Yemen by attempting to legitimize his sources. From this claim, another argumentation strategy topos related **to mainstream media** can be deducted, which implies that if content is backed by mainstream media, it should be accepted. Additionally, a predication discursive strategy is used to label Business Times and Huffington Post as good news sources in order to legitimize the claim:

“Article made by student also counts a source. The reason why this is not biased, libelous and poorly written is because International Business Times and Huffington Post are good news source.”

Furthermore, the contributor attacks the challenger of his content with nomination by defining the Wikipedian as part of the Russian military:

“Based on your edits, I suspected you are from the Russian military. If am wrong, explain who you actually are. You are really misunderstanding the articles if you have not read these carefully.”

Within the English-speaking Wikipedia, English sources are given much more weight, as other contributors are unable to properly verify provided information. This issue contributes to natural language bias, as the English Wikipedia is the most read Wikipedia, and it is therefore mainly dominated by English speaking sources. For example, a dispute over placing “alleged” parties into the Yemen Civil War infobox arises. The argument claims that while Hurriyet and al-Jazeera are generally reliable sources, they are still not sufficient as a lot of information gathered there is in Turkish. Thus, a more mainstream

source is required. This claim illustrates an argumentation discursive strategy topos involving the **English language**, which implies that if non-English language media is used, it should be questioned.

“Moreover, currently only Turkish-language sources seem to support the claims regarding Iran and Hezbollah and frankly - even though sources are reliable (Hurriyet and al-Jazeera) this is not sufficient, since most English-lang wikipedians do not speak Turkish and cannot verify the claims. Would be happy if someone brings English lang sources or otherwise i delete those parties from the infobox”

Furthermore, **disputes over which sources are mainstream are common**, and trend-setting. In the following example, it can be seen how accepting or rejecting the mainstream quality of a source can help prevent or on the other hand promote further edit wars. In this mentioned example, a dispute over the inclusion of Russia and North Korea as supporting factions for the Houthis arises. This claim illustrates another argumentation discursive strategy related to **mainstream media topoi**, which implies that if a reference is not considered mainstream, it should be questioned. The credibility of sources is challenged through predication discursive strategies by labeling different media as reliable or unreliable and a discussion over these labels ensues. The argument is intensified by a hyperbole device (if combatants use AK47, in relation to the classical Russian machine guns, should they be considered to be supported by Russia?):

Deliberations Starter: “Sources that are cited are not credible at all and it is really unlikely that these two countries are supporting Houthis”

“The Huffington Post, The Daily Star, VICE News, alarabiya.net, www.upi.com, International Business Times and etc, none of them are reliable sources. The only reliable sources is Reuters that only indicates that "Yemen's missiles were

amassed over the course of decades in legal acquisitions from the Soviet Union and North Korea", Yemen government bought them from Soviets and NK, not Houthis and it is done years ago. And almost all military groups use AK47, so should we consider that all of these groups are being supported by Russia?"

Contributor A (as direct response): "Where are you getting that idea from? Those news outlets are used consistently on Wikipedia without problem. And, what, how is Reuters the only reliable source? The claims for Ahrar al-Najran's involvement in the war don't come from Reuters. Should we remove that too?"

The discussion goes on about the writing style of mentioned sources, which does not use a professional, but sensationalized language, which shows an argumentation strategy involving a **professionalism topos**, which implies that if sensationalist language is used, it should be discarded. Wikipedians dispute whether Reuters, HuffPost and other mentioned sources have the merits to be reliable in their articles regarding Yemen. Finally, participating contributors discuss how to deal with pro-Saudi and anti-Iranian editors which monitor the page (Referential discursive practice). The consensus between contributors is that if North Korea and Russia are not deemed participants, with similar logic as explained during the discussion, Hezbollah and Iran should be disregarded as well, and this would create conflict that wants to be avoided. The resolution decides by consensus to leave it as it is, pressured by further potential edit wars. Throughout this

discussion, a predication discursive strategy is shown by labeling authors of perceived non-mainstream sources as “deranged individuals”.

“When it comes to Russia and DPRK, those allegations were thrown around by lone, possibly deranged individual editors which have wrote deliberately inflammatory articles for the respective sites,”

Often enough, the “mainstream” quality of a medium is mentioned, assumed, but not discussed. Certain media sources are not challenged as frequently and as harshly as others, as their reliability, neutrality and independence is taken for granted, contributing to reproduction of organic hegemony and unequal power relations.

5.3.2. Verifiability/Reliabilitty

In relation to the topic on whether a piece of media is regarded as mainstream or not, published article content is considered in terms on whether the information provided can be **verified** by other contributors using reliable sources, as per the Wikipedia Verifiability policy (Wikipedia, Verifiability, n.d.). On occasion, Wikipedia contributors have to determine how a source can be verified in order to be considered reliable. In the case of the War in Donbass, the question arises as to whether the twitter account of the Donetsk National Republic (DNR) can be considered an official self-source, without regarding the veracity of the information they provide. A contributor comes up with the idea that if both pro-Russian and Western sources consider it official, then it can be verified:

“This Slate article claims that dnrpress is the "official Twitter account" of the Donetsk People's Republic". So does this RIA Novosti article. Since both pro-NATO and pro-Russia news sources seem to say that it is official, would it make

sense to treat all statements made on that account as being official statements of the Donetsk Republic?”

To which another two contributors add comments on this regard while using a predication discursive strategy which labels Russian newspapers as non-reliable:

“If the claims are notable, then they will be mentioned by reliable sources such as non-Russian newspapers. That would provide a reliable source for the terrorists making the claims. If non-Russian newspapers ignore the claims, then the claims cannot be notable, so there is no justification for mentioning them on Wikipedia”

“If they don't appear in non-Russian sources, we have to take them with a grain of salt. If they had credibility, secondary sources from outside Russia would pick them up. It isn't really that hard to figure out, given the information war that is now occurring.”

Thus, Wikipedia contributors within this particular article assume that there is an information war going on and that it will affect their tasks of creating an encyclopedia article. Through these statements, they create a practice of not accepting any information which solely comes from Russian sources, creating an asymmetry in the information flow and giving more priority and thus legitimizing the reliability of Western sources over Russian ones and illustrating an argumentation discursive practice related to a **point of view topos** which implies that if sources are perceived to be biased, they should be excluded. However, Wikipedians that dispute this decision make use of another aspect of

point of view argumentation topoi, which implies that if sources are official even if they are considered biased, they should be included.

Verifiability seems to be a very important concept for Wikipedians, due to the constant struggle of attempting to maintain an unbiased factual article. A contributor in the Yemeni Civil War article voices his or her concerns on this struggle by intensifying bad practice regarding verifiability of information and nominating another Wikipedian as a PoV pusher:

“Some person named **** again putted up this "alleged support", with highly outdated sources written by some student in 2015 claiming that DPRK, Russia and Iran are participating in the conflict. I mean seriously, alleged support is not support at all! Could anyone please remove all the alleged support section altogether? It does nothing to improve quality of the article, besides of causing unnecessary friction and demonizing the nations in question. Governments of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and US have long argued that Iran is somehow involved in that conflict without providing any proof whatsoever but addition of DPRK and Russia to the list is absolutely libelous and against the spirit of Wikipedia if not against some of the rules themselves, the proof against those countries is virtually non-existent apart from some article written by a student in 2015 speculating that Russia somehow could be possibly involved, I mean come on, I could write an article about United States supporting ISIS or Al-Qaeda and add it as a source justifying labeling US as supporter of those groups and that source would carry more weight than this piece of crap”

Additionally, understandings of verifiability are inevitably linked to what contributors consider to be mainstream media. In a deliberation regarding the origins of certain information attributed to unidentified “state media”, the resolution and consensus ends in using an assumed neutral point of view directly related to its geopolitical location, thus legitimizing the understanding that some media is less biased if it comes from a neutral

European country, in this case Denmark. The deliberation starts by contesting a source about casualty figures with the help of an intensification discursive strategy involving the use of quotations as support for an argument:

“the Al Jazeera source says "according to state media", why do you attribute this claim to the Houthis ?” – Wikipedian A.

The complaint is admitted by the author of the information which labels Al-Jazeera as a more accurate source: “You are free to change it to Al-Jazeera claim which is probably more accurate” – Wikipedian B. However, the discussion over the interpretation of information coming from sources falls on geopolitical legitimization of information from a neutral Western state, when contributor A through a predication discursive strategy declares the source to be neutral based on its geopolitical origin:

“Regarding Risk Intelligence (The Twitter user I linked to - their official Twitter user) they are actually a quite serious source. I just linked to their Twitter user as it contains maps of conflict zones. They are based in Denmark so hardly partial.”
– Contributor A

In another case, within the War in Donbass article, consensus overruled some contributor’s claims for unreliable information. The information coming from a certain journalist dubbed as a “pro-ukranian activist” is challenged by a contributor on the grounds of previous absurd claims: “This is the same woman who told about the zombie rays of the russian army. She is just a media person, not a reliable source.” One of the main contributors to the War in Donbass article comments through a perspectivization discourse

strategy that while he is himself against the inclusion of this source, his opinion was overruled by consensus:

“to be honest, I myself argued against including that figure in the infobox and instead for it to be mentioned in the casualties section only within the main body of the text (with proper attribution). However, others (most) were for the inclusion in the infobox as well and thus it is so.”

This instance shows that while rational Wikipedia contributors adhere to established collaboration practices, they still reserve the right to disagree with the outcome.

In other cases, many edits provide content with no discernible or questionable sources, the challenge and defense of this content is a prominent topic within controversial Wikipedia articles. For example, in the Yemeni Civil War article, a deliberation regarding the placement of Israel as a belligerent faction expresses the following:

“Some users seem to have an obsession with adding Israel in every military infobox on Wikipedia. This time an IP did so citing an article by Veterans Today, which is filled to the brink with holocaust denial and conspiratorial theories. Unless claims of Israeli involvement can be backed by serious, mainstream sources, please stick it with your personal agenda and refrain from inserting them anywhere on Wikipedia. This is vandalism at best.”

A nomination strategy defines the “IP” as a Wikipedia outsider and labels him through predication as a PoV pusher. This claim addresses the problem with which Wikipedia often has to deal: **partisan vandalism** and illustrates the use of an argumentation strategy related to **partisanship topoi**, which implies that if content expresses partisan views, it should be removed. These actions are discredited on the basis of questioning the reliability of the sources, which are not verified. Furthermore, through a further predication discursive

practice, the mentioned source is defined as “conspiracists and holocaust deniers”. Moreover, a comment from another contributor through referential discursive practices includes Turkey in this process. “This is very problematic all across wikipedia - mainly concerning Israel and to some degree Turkey”. The same issue with verifiability was expressed in the previous example, where a contributor admits that sources are reliable, but he deems them not sufficient as they are mostly Turkish, which is not verifiable by English-speaking contributors. This denotes the importance and influence of language within the power struggles underlying the knowledge creation process in the online encyclopedia and illustrates another aspect of the **partisanship topos** which implies that if a source is perceived to be unreliable, it should be excluded.

The War in Darfur article has also encountered such disruptive non-contributing participations. Generally, they are from unsigned contributors or throwaway accounts that express their distress at the information and discussions included in the articles, often using brash and aggressive language, with referential discursive strategies which label the speaker as a Wikipedia outsider, and label Wikipedia itself through a predication strategy as a biased (among other things) environment:

“As typical of the God-damned, non academic Wikipedia, this site is full of subtle but damning errors of FACT, exacerbated by biases. [...] It is the usual (Conservative) bias and sloppy, slovenly, and slack "scholarship" that reflect the anti-intellectual biases of wiki as a whole that infects this and so many other entries therein.”

In this case, the arguments provided lacked sources, and the discussion was intentionally disruptive.

Furthermore, in the War in Donbass article, due to the ongoing information war, it is very common to find unsigned contributors making claims which are denounced as original

research by the rest of the contributor community. This activity forces the article talk page to turn into a discussion board where contributors are forced to state their opinions on the developments of the war, instead of putting their efforts into the development of the article from an NPoV perspective. A good example is a deliberation in the War in Donbass article about a fatality claim from a Donetsk National Republic figurehead about the governmental Ukrainian forces. Much of the discussion deviates from the criticism of the merits of the source as WP:SELSOURCE (questionable sources talking about themselves can on occasion be considered valid), into disbelief and original research about the impossibility of such a figure. This quote is one of many which illustrates the nature of the discussion:

“I seriously doubt there can be more than a few thousands Ukrainian soldiers active in Donbas. The Ukrainian government is woefully short on funds. Even if it conscripts tens of thousands, it has no money to train them, arm them and deploy them. Only a small fraction of the 90,000 active personnel are fit for combat, and certainly not all of them can be sent to fight in Donbas all at once.”(comment from an unsigned contributor)

5.3.3. Duality

Finally, some Wikipedian contributors call for a **duality of sources in order to maintain Neutrality**. Especially in articles about war and conflict, it is understood that **all official views should be represented**, even if they provide opposite and contradictory information, as it is natural in any conflict given the existence of a fog of war. On the other hand, other groups of contributors call for **sources which position themselves neutrally** in relation to the conflict. Because this neutrality is difficult to determine, as most international actors possess their own geopolitical agenda, the duality of sources or lack of thereof is a common discursive topic within controversial Wikipedia articles about war. For example, a question (Oct 2016) is placed by a user regarding the lack of a war timeline,

and citing that since the end of 2015 the article has been stagnant. A response by a user whose Wikipedia account has been deleted replies with an interesting account and complaint about related praxis, while using predication discursive strategies by labeling Wikipedia's coverage as petulant, and Al-Masdar News to be reliable:

“Wikipedia's coverage of the whole Yemeni war has been somewhat paralyzed by a petulant refusal to allow Al-Masdar News to be used as a source, despite the fact that Al-Masdar is one of the only media outlets in the world, especially in English, that frequently covers this conflict and has sources inside Yemen. Al-Masdar is already heavily used for Syria articles, but for Yemen it's not allowed for some reason. The claim is that Al-Masdar is "biased" in favor of the Houthis and against Saudi Arabia and the Hadi regime. So instead, only information from mainstream Western and Gulf Arab countries' media outlets, which in themselves are heavily biased against the Houthis and in favor of Saudi Arabia and the Hadi regime, are allowed. And even many of those outlets barely report on the Yemeni war. The result is that hardly anything is added to Yemeni war articles on Wikipedia, and when it is it's skewed against the Houthis and in favor of the pro-Hadi forces. It's a big problem, in my opinion. Since both sides are either biased or alleged to be so, it seems to me that both sides should be allowed to be used as sources (rather than just one of them) and then just compare the claims on specifics.”

In this example, a representation of all official views is sought in order to balance with what the contributor considers to be pro Iran/Houthi sources. The contributor does not ask for removal of what according to him is biased information (use of referential discursive strategy to group sources as pro Houthi/Iran), but rather, to include opposing views, a claim

which illustrates an argumentation strategy related to a point of view topos which implies that if one side is over-represented, representation from the other side should be added:

“I have been noticing that the 2018 development section, for the vast majority, is citing sources such as "<http://www.shiitenews.org/>", which is very pro Iran/Houthi. You can clearly notice that initially from the name of the website itself. Such citation is biased, and clearly depicting the Arabian coalition as warmongers and civilian-hunting criminals. In order to maintain neutrality in this page, I suggest also citing pro Arabian coalition sources (e.g. alarabiya.net, sabq.org, arabnews.com), which I can hardly see being cited.”

Furthermore, official views are put into question in the War in Donbass article. During the chaotic period of 2014, where Russian involvement in the Ukrainian conflict was continuously questioned, a deliberation was put forth asking to remove Russian involvement in military actions as it was not official according to Russian government. This illustrates another topos related to **point of view** as an argumentation strategy which implies that if sources are not official, they should be excluded. Additionally, intensification discursive strategy with the help of modal verbs as devices which modify the utterance to denote how Wikipedia should behave (“Wikipedia should be factual and unbiased”):

“Unless proven with concrete evidence or unless the Russian government officially states that it is involved in the war, the Russia (denied by Russia) should not be there. Wikipedia should be factual and unbiased, not based on personal opinions” (Deliberation starter).

This request finds opposition, as a main contributor claims that Russian involvement is what “reliable” sources are declaring. This notion is contested on precedents for the Russo-

Georgian war and predication discursive strategies which label American and EU news sources as having an agenda:

“I agree with Anonymous below that many American (as well as EU) news sources should be treated with some suspicion since they're generally just as much a part of this information war as the Russian ones (just like the situation with the information war during the Russo-Georgian War - look at that article once the dust has settled, and you can see plenty of misreporting on both sides by so-called "reliable sources"”

Here, the duality of sources is accepted, as well as the bias that each cultural block may have. However, a debate on the nature of Wikipedia's role in reporting an armed conflict arises. On the one hand, the notion that it is not Wikipedia's job to discern right from wrong, or true from false, it is Wikipedia's job to gather and report what reliable sources say on the subject by including participants in the Wikipedian in-group through referential discursive strategy in an attempt to sway participants towards accepting his discourse:

“Our job is to report what the reliable sources say. It isn't our job to "correct" them if they are "wrong", as that would be WP:Original research”.

On the other hand, contributors are aware of the responsibility Wikipedia has to factual information, and the impact it may have on society. Therefore, simply reproducing the information from those sources considered to be reliable is not enough in order to produce a well-developed encyclopedic article:

“A war is a war. One must, however, be very cautious in the presentation of information. Accusations cannot be taken as facts. Just because some source on the internet, reliable or otherwise, accuse Russia of supporting freedom fighters, one should not, unless absolute proof is obtained, state that the Russian

government is in fact involved in the war. This is called innocence until proven guilty, a pillar of Western law. No matter how emotional one may be, rationality and adherence to law is a must, especially in relation to a public, factual, unbiased source of information as Wikipedia”

In a final example, agreeing with this notion is an early deliberation from the beginnings of the War in Darfur article from the year 2004. Contributors of the early Wikipedia are challenging the media’s notion that the conflict can be reduced to Arabs vs Blacks.

“There seems to be a continual equation with the black-africans as just Africans and the arab-africans as Arabs. This needs to be corrected it is laced throughout the article. Both are just as african as the other. I have no idea if this was intentional or not but one could misread the article and make unfortunate assumptions. I will not edit the article content until this matter is taken up here and reaches consensus.”

“The ignorance shown in the press seems stemmed from the idea that Arab and black are mutually exclusive or objective terms. One reading of the conflict is that many of the Janjaweed did not identify as Arab only a generation ago. This changes things decidedly toward the political and away from the ethnic.”

Several deliberations deal with this issue and contributors take it upon themselves to find a more suitable terminology based on their perception of the situation, without specifically adhering to what the media used in the article is saying. This is contrary to the claim in War in Donbass article on the tasks of the Wikipedia editor: “Our job is to report what the reliable sources say. It isn't our job to "correct" them if they are "wrong". The No Original Research policy predates the deliberation in the War in Darfur article. However, each sub-community of contributors creates its own practices and culture within the article which are not necessarily strictly based on Wikipedia policy, assuming that consensus is

achieved. Below, the consensus and the resulting practice is shown in the words of the contributors who use a perspectivization discursive strategy to illustrate their points of view and intensification strategy which express their feelings on the subject:

“Can we just use the terms haphazardly and assume that since they are self-identified, then readers can make up their own minds? By using the terms we give them legitimacy. I believe we need to counteract that legitimacy by explaining that the terms aren't set in stone.”

“I think putting it at the very start is too intrusive, but a note on the flexibility of these "ethnic" terms could certainly be good for the article. That applies especially for "Arab", since virtually all Arabs are Arab by self-definition, not descent.”

5.4. Wikipedian Framing of Content

How and where the content is set frames Wikipedia knowledge in specific ways. Which content is directly visible? Which content is found within headings and which is found within subheadings? How is the map illustrated? The specific answers to each of these questions condition article development and thus discourse topics in regards to article structure arise.

5.4.1. *Delimitation of Conflict*

First, within controversial articles about war, the **delimitation** (of which 62 instances are found across researched articles) over what is and what is not the conflict will strongly influence article content. **Article splits** with different sub-topics and **article merges** when topics are deemed related create the setting for the information to be provided by voluntary

contributors. For example, a dispute arises over a proposed **massive overhaul** to the article of the Yemen Civil War. As the understanding of what is considered to be the Yemeni conflict in mainstream media improves, contributors discuss about the idea that all armed actions in Yemen should be encompassed under the specific article on Yemeni Civil War, as it is starting to be understood as such. At the time of the deliberation, there were several different articles with overlapping content making a clear organization difficult to achieve. Different contributors have different opinions on how it should be done and an argumentation discursive strategy is observed involving a **scope topos** which implies that if content is outside of the scope of the topic, it should be removed. One Wikipedian makes the following observation aided by a referential discursive strategy by including himself in the Wikipedian in-group while excluding his opponent into the Wikipedian out-group (“we” – as part of the resolution process as opposed to “**you** fail to realize” as a part of the problem):

“...the "Yemen articles" are fairly organized at the moment, and "solutions" like that are the reason why we end up with a lot with conflicts that are hard to organize in the first place. This is also the reason why we sometimes fail to determine start/end dates. Contrary to your opinion, I believe that such splits are actually helpful for readers to make a distinction between the breaks and escalations in any conflict. After all, escalations are usually notable enough to merit separate articles, something you sadly failed to realize last summer during

the IS offensive in Iraq when some editors kept calling for a new umbrella article...”

This illustrates the difficulties and importance of proper article organization from the perspective of contributing Wikipedians as well as this particular user’s resentment to previous editing events.

Given that current and on-going wars and armed conflicts unfold and develop in real-time, it is hard for contributors to create an all-encompassing article which includes consensus. For this reason, petitions for the merging or splitting of the content of a controversial article about war are quite common. In the War in Darfur, a section dealing with reports of slavery in Southern Sudan is deemed unnecessary as “It is largely about Southern Sudan. There is very little tying the Darfur conflict in”. The issue is resolved by agreeing to include this information in different related articles. Another example is found in a proposal for splitting a section of the Yemeni Civil War article into a separate article. One of the main contributors to the article decides to go ahead and perform the split with the following justification: Actually, since I really don't anticipate any objections, I'm going to go ahead and spin it off as a stub-class article. Please, add more to it once it's up”. His action is challenged on the grounds of:

“It seems you made the split too early and without an agreement on proper article naming. The result was immediate re-merge request and i guess quite a few of us may challenge your naming of the new article”.

Following this action, a deliberation to re-merge the article immediately ensues

The naming of an article is often related to the idea of a delimitation of the conflict. In the case of the War in Donbass, the naming of the insurgent region inconsistently used by the media created confusion in the appropriate terminology to be used in the encyclopedic

article. Contributors complained that naming the article 2014 insurgency in Donetsk and Luhansk was an unnecessary long title –“ Maybe this should be moved to 2014 insurgency in East Ukraine? The current title is too long imho” – and too precise for the purposes of usability and readability –“ WP:PRECISE says an article name should be precise but not too precise. East Ukraine is precise. Donetsk and Luhansk is too precise.” -. However, a disagreement was formed on the basis of “Eastern Ukraine” containing the provinces of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv, and as Kharkiv was not found to be a participant in the insurgency through referential discursive practice which excluded Kharkiv from uprising regions, the title would be incorrect: “Because it doesn't encompass fighting in Kharkiv, and to title it with "eastern Ukraine" would be misleading, blowing the conflict out of proportion”. This prompts a dispute on whether the events happening in Kharkiv by June 2014 were considered part of the insurgency conflict and thus defining the scope of the article:

“The thing is, Eastern Ukraine is made up of the provinces of Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Donetsk. The insurgency is only taking place in Luhansk and Donetsk, but there have been important incidents in Kharkiv, such as the RSA storming and eviction, and the assassination attempt of Gennady Kernes”

“This article is only about the insurgency. There is no insurgency in Kharkiv. Hence, it is wrong to say "eastern Ukraine". Perhaps "Donets Basin" might be more concise, but I think that's less WP:NATURAL to English speakers” –

5.4.2. Article Scope

The **scope of the article** is commonly deliberated upon. What sort of information deserves to be in the article and which should be placed elsewhere is a constant matter of contention and discussion? For example, an information request is put in order to include Al-Qaeda as a belligerent faction. A dispute ensues where the article scope is delimited by indicating

that the source is not trustworthy, without any other indication than the personal opinion of the contributor with an argumentation discursive strategy implying that if a source is perceived to be biased, it should be excluded. “I’m going to say let’s wait on this. For one, Antiwar.com isn’t a very good source”. Furthermore, it is stated that these topics are covered elsewhere in Wikipedia, and thus have no place in this article.

“Clashes between AQAP and both the “official” government and the Houthis/Saleh loyalists have been ongoing for literally years, and while I certainly think jihadist groups are taking advantage of the power vacuum, that’s best covered on al-Qaeda insurgency in Yemen and Aftermath of the 2014–15 Yemeni coup d’état for right now.”

The article scope discourse topic is thus used as a justification for keeping/including information based on –in this case- subjective perceptions of contributors.

More examples show that this practice of delimiting the article scope by proposing article merging or splitting is a constant topic (33 instances of deliberation across articles) within editing and discussion in controversial Wikipedia articles. A merging proposal between the Yemeni Civil War article and The Aftermath of Yemen coup d’état is discussed during April 2015. There are several processes of note. First, the referential discursive practice is present, labeling certain editors as a core Wikipedian in-group, as within the introduction of the proposal, several contributors are directly asked to weigh in. This practice solidifies the idea that these are the main contributors whose opinion on the development of the article carries more weight. Furthermore, within the same discussion, an unregistered user complains about the attitude of one of the main contributors, using inappropriate language:

“@Wikipedian A: I also complaint against your behavior. You can not send me warning. Do you think what you say is correct and others don’t know anything

?!?!? Oh please be LOGICAL. OK? I wish you have better solution to solve the problems. Regards, Wikipedian B.

This comment is simply ignored during the discussion, as it seems that the in-group does not feel the need to respond to outside criticism. The outcome of the proposal is a lack of consensus, and a tag asking to not modify the comments cements the decision as a precedent for future discussions.

The War in Darfur article had two main problems in this regard. First, the article was too big: “I am trying to think of ways to bring the length of this article down to the recommended 32 kb (20 minutes reading time) from the 75kb it is at now.” Second, the size of the article was influenced by what some contributors perceived as “skewed towards Westerners shuffling pieces of paper and issuing proclamations and is shamefully lacking in information about the actual conflict as experienced in Sudan” labeling Wikipedians through referential discursive strategy as inept and biased. This whole notion originated within a deliberation on the merits of having points of view regarding criticism of the war, which would warrant its own section within the article. A discussion established by consensus that all these media opinions were cluttering the article with irrelevant information and what was considered important information about the happenings of the war was lost in the haystack. After a general overhaul and reduction of the article was made, a contributor strengthened consensus as follows, while at the same time employing a predication discursive strategy which labeled the previous version article as non-encyclopedic: “your changes are very much an improvement. The previous version seemed more preoccupied with the speculative impact on US politics than the actual conflict.” Here, the natural Western bias of the English language (Graham, 2015) can be seen in full force, as primarily English-speaking contributors edit the Wikipedia page of a current African war, funneling through their own regional preoccupations while paying less attention to the actual events in Sudan. As Graham (2015) puts it, Wikipedia is characterized by highly uneven geographies of participation where many articles about

places are edited by non-locals and participation from the world's economic peripheries tends to focus on editing about the world's cores rather than their own local regions. Fortunately, in this case, measures were taken by consensus in an attempt to reduce this practice for the War in Darfur conflict.

Sometimes, article splitting in order to address its scope can create confusion for the editors and Wikipedia users. In the case of the War in Darfur article, a contributor complains on this issue:

“some of us were contributing to an ongoing timeline of facts about the conflict. That was moved over to international response to the Darfur conflict, which is fine. But it seems like since that time, a new timeline has begun on this page. It doesn't reference the other timeline, and while the first two years are basically overview summaries, the past few months have been recounted in as detailed a way as in the other timeline.”

This type of confusion created a duplicate amount of work, as new contributors who were not aware of the previous practice of splitting the timeline, took it upon themselves to create another one again in the main article.

5.4.3. Article Organization

Finally, a prominent topic of discussion is the **organization of the article**, which strictly guides the outcome of content within controversial articles. Items such as **headings and sub-headings, maps, paragraphs and figures** are placed under contention and are challenged or justified in order to change or retain content (67 deliberations regarding the organization of the articles were found). Within articles on war, the fog of war often produces confusion over who exactly are the belligerent factions within a conflict. Therefore, the information present in the **infobox** for quick referencing to potential readers

is a top priority item (362 mentions of infobox across articles). As an example of this confusion, a proposal is created in order to place AQAP/ISIL organizations under the same column than Hadi/STC forces in the Yemeni Civil War article infobox, as according to sources the factions are currently allied against the Houthis. A discussion over the organization of the infobox arises:

(Wikipedian A): “No, keep the factions separate. The Jihadist groups are obviously a third/fourth party, no matter who they may temporarily fight with. Also, ISIL has never fought for any other side, as far as I know”

(Wikipedian B): “According to the source, they are allied since 2016. And when the parties will again ended their alliance, we could changed the infobox, like for Saleh”.

(Wikipedian C): “How does it make sense to put two factions actively at war with each other in the same column? It's worse for an infobox to be actively wrong than slightly inconvenient”.

This discussion showcases the importance of the infobox organization and the different perspectives that contributors may have on its usefulness. On the one hand, readability and usability is emphasized, on the other hand, the precision of provided information. The infobox is found to be a common item under discussion within the organization topic and a matter of many edit wars. In another example, the infobox placing Al Qaeda and Hadi and the Saudis is challenged after a brief edit war that changed and unchanged this information. The challenge is disputed through predication discursive strategy, where

another contributor accuses the challenger of deleting sourced material without proper support and referencing.

“this isn't your first time to try to push some biased narratives. You deleted sourced information and you provided nothing to support your deletion. Here are some sources [6],[7],[8]”.

General article organization highlights interesting processes. A dispute arises over the **order of events** in April 2015. In this article, they are organized by location. A contributor makes the case that a chronological order is more appropriate. A disputing contributor mentions that “convenience and navigability should be prized over simple chronology”. Currently, the article is still organized by location, and an additional article listing the timeline exists. Furthermore, a dispute over article organization exemplifies an interesting process. It happens on occasion that guest contributors will attempt to generate new information which will be reverted because according to the interpretation of more “veteran” contributors within the article said information does not conform to organizational standards. Sometimes users shed light on this issue on the talk page. In this example the complaint was ignored and the new user did not push his edit against the more veteran user. This shows that early influential editors are important for establishing structures (O’Mahony, Ferraro, 2007). Example accompanied by perspectivization discourse strategy:

“- I also listed army units known to be loyal to Hadi one by one, adding a source for each of those. However, someone with the nick “*****” just put Yemen’s army then on the side of Mr.Hadi again without giving any source for this,

deleting my sources and just saying “That section is for the military strength, not units.”

Furthermore, a strong dispute over the inclusion or exclusion of the “Southern Movement” as an independent belligerent faction, or else, a sub-faction of the popular resistance in the article infobox is discussed. The dispute gets out of hand and becomes personal, as it seems to be important for two users where and how this information is displayed. Several discursive strategies are displayed such as predication which labels Wikipedians as biased, and perspectivization discursive strategies with which competing actors are represented.

“Those are enough reasons for thus adding it to the Belligerents section under the PR label in the infobox. Now, counter me with arguments and not hypocritical ad hominem about my perceived political bias.”

“I can understand the confusion due too my adversary IP ADDRESS**** misquoting me and trying to use my words against me instead of trying to create an argument”

“Firstly, don't blame me for "misquoting" you, blame your faulty communication skills for not being able to express yourself concisely.”

“Secondly, don't insult anyone's intelligence here by pretending your votes were legit, it's not exactly rocket science to identify sockpuppeting in action. Enough fake posturing - threatening me with sanctions on a fake basis, considering your own flawed actions, makes you deserving of any such correctional measures, that you'd wish upon me”

Eventually the discussion became really personal, and it is difficult to understand why the organization of the infobox regarding belligerent was so important for the warring editors.

The contributors attempted to validate their points of view with examples, and would continuously disregard opposing examples as invalid in their context. The dispute is resolved through an edit and a new reference from a third-party editor which manages to force both contributing opponents to ambiguously agree (see clarity/ambiguity section 5.2.3.)

Deliberations over **maps** are often present within controversial articles about war. Some of these deliberations show interesting processes: a request to change map colors is disputed by claims to inter-article consistency.

“al-Qaeda gets grey for towns/villages and white for territory, and ISIL gets black for town/villages and grey for territory (on the map file). This is how the color was assigned for the other Middle East maps, so it will also apply to this map”.

It is interesting to see how standardization spreads through Wikipedia in this manner, in this case, for Middle Eastern conflicts. Additionally, a request for a map update is delimited by technical expertise, as a proposed change cannot be made due to lack of technical knowledge. The map editor underlines that he can only update the map. Contributions are limited by expertise:

“The creator of the map is ****. Leave a message on his talk page and he'll likely respond”.

“I want to underline, that the creator of the map is **** and not me. I'm only the one who currently updates the map.

The other point is, that I only use the informations given by Module:Yemeni Civil War detailed map and Template:Yemeni Civil War detailed map. I can't make the changes you told me, since you haven't given sources for these informations

yet. If you have sources but don't know how to edit at the Module:Yemeni Civil War detailed map, you can just send me sources and I will implement the changes when I find the time to”

Finally, **headings and sections** of the article greatly determine the way in which it is written and what direction its development takes. In the War in Darfur article, a “Humanitarian Aid” section was the object of deliberation as its purpose was challenged by some contributors. Proponents argued that “The entire reason why most users are logging into this Darfur page is because of the humanitarian aid crisis”. However, the purpose of having a humanitarian aid section was challenged:

“The point also is not to list all humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs on the planet, in this article, I realize: that would be mere duplication, as I'm sure there are other Wikipedia articles which do that -- if not there ought to be.”

The conflict here is important for the organization of the article and Wikipedia as a whole. The solution falls into a common practice of splitting articles by creating a dedicated Wikipedia article about humanitarian aid, rather than merging it into the War in Darfur article:

“I agree with [wikipedian], a link to a list of humanitarian agencies is much better than this article maintaining a list of agencies,”.

An interesting feature of this discussion is a common occurrence in Wikipedia talk pages. Sometimes actions are taken based on consensus or perceived consensus without attempting to analyze how or by whom this consensus was achieved. Within this

discussion, a statement was made which used a perceived notion of consensus in order to support the argument:

“I have reverted your edits, because the consensus here is that the links are useful. If you'd like to improve how they are organised or described, or add more links then great, but removing them is the wrong way to go”.

However, in reality consensus was only apparent, and the previous quote was attempting to reinforce this idea in order to support its own Point of View. A different contributor realizes this and writes: “[****]”¹⁷ is a consensus?

In conclusion, the purpose of this chapter was to address the first aim of this dissertation in regards to how conflict is represented throughout the editing and discussion process of controversial Wikipedia articles about on-going wars and its two underlying research questions about which items are discussed during the editing process and what processes do Wikipedians use in order to legitimize their content. We have seen throughout the chapter what issues were important for Wikipedians that would warrant discussion and have unraveled argumentation discursive practices with which it was possible to establish topoi that apply to a politically contentious Wikipedia environment which illustrates Wikipedian discursive practice.

6. Conflict Analysis

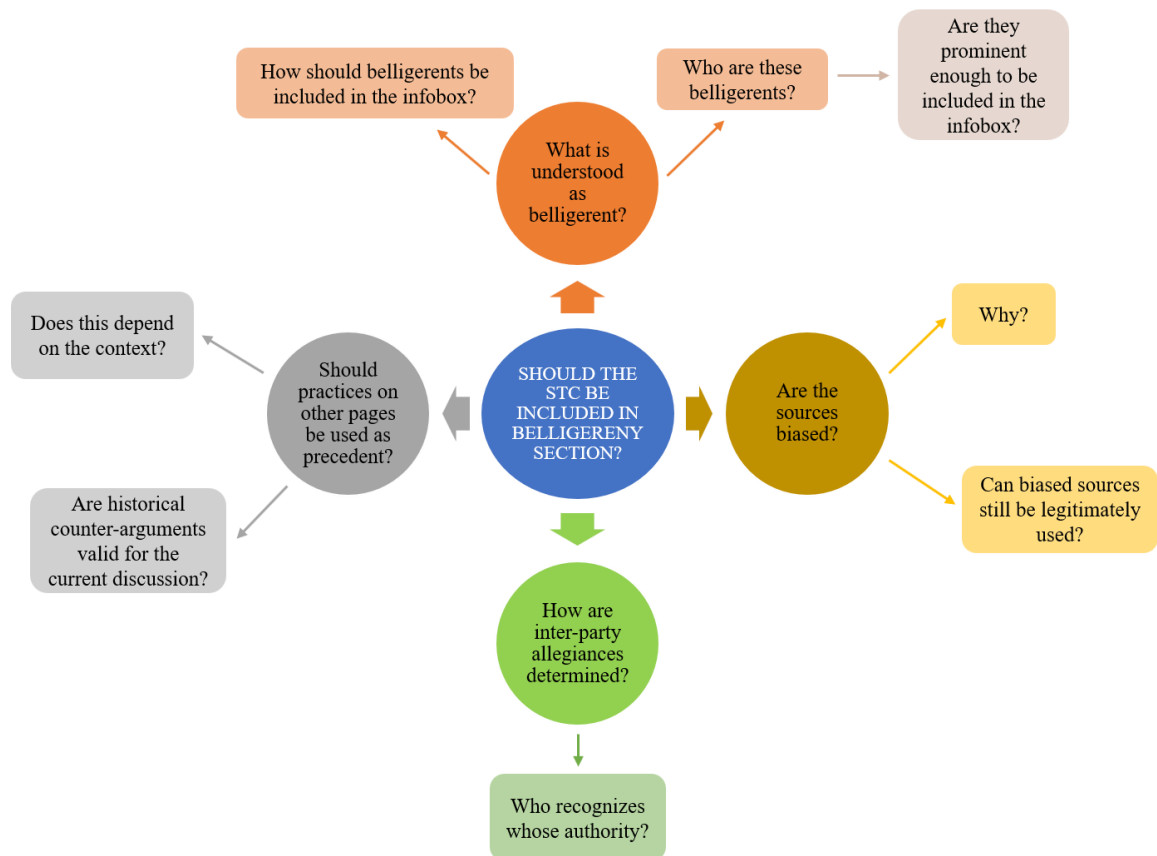
In the previous chapter we have seen how deliberation objects are discussed upon with the use of discursive strategies applied from the discourse historical approach. Additionally, Wikipedian discourse topoi have been identified within the context of current, ongoing, socio-political articles about war, and how they affect information and national and

¹⁷ The quote is referring to another contributor whose username is hidden by asterisks due to privacy issues.

international power struggles and relationships. In the following chapter, Habermas validity claims operationalized by Cukier et al. (2004) will be used as a different approach for the purpose of establishing when ideal speech situations which could contribute to improve consensus-seeking practices and collaborative knowledge building are not realized. The purpose of this approach will be to reveal possible communicative distortions in order to improve Wikipedia practice. For this purpose, three special deliberation cases characterized by their extension, high degree of contention and their capacity for establishing precedents and thereby further influencing article development are chosen. The cases consist of two discussions within the Yemeni Civil War article about belligerents and media respectively, and one discussion in the War in Donbass article regarding the

framing of the conflict. The War in Darfur article was not found to have suitable extensive cases comparable to the cases chosen.

6.1. Who participates in the war?



ALL QUESTIONS ARE IMBUED WITH DISCUSSION OVER SEMANTICS

Figure 23: Discussion layout

In the Yemeni Civil War article, a dispute arose between two prominent article contributors, which eventually turned into an edit war, and finally a conflict resolution process ensued. This particular deliberation case illustrates many of the most characteristic features of Wikipedia disputes. It shows a seemingly unsolvable discussion over a technicality over a definition of belligerent (figure 23) which appears to be very important for the participating contributors; it shows the intricacies and discussions within a dispute

resolution process; and it highlights several dilemmas in Wikipedia praxis and philosophy (figure 24).

Underlying Dilemmas in Wikipedia Practices

- Should placing conversation related to the article within its talkpage be common practice?
- Should practices on other pages set a standard to be followed?
- Can each article develop its own independent practices given its own particular content?
- Can biased sources be appropriately used in Wikipedia if they are contextually justified?
- Should page protection be used to only stop already occurring disruption, and not to prevent possible future disruptions?
- Is it positive that conflict mediators are not necessarily familiar with the discussion topic?
- Can a lack of challenge to introduced content be regarded as consensus?
- Should Wikipedia information emphasize simplicity or accuracy?
- Should the Wikipedia cater primarily to the needs of its viewers, or commit to a more detailed development of its information?
- Can edit wars perdure despite clear communication between contributors?

Figure 24: Dilemmas in Wikipedia practices

The focus of the dispute is about the Yemen Southern Movement and the Southern Transitional Council, and whether or not these organizations should be included in the infobox of the article and how they should be described. As at the point when the dispute started, these issues were not resolved, the article bore the Update template¹⁸, a marker which indicates that a Wikipedia article is old or has out-of-date sections.

The reasons for the dispute lie in the inclusion in or removal from the infobox of specific, supposedly belligerent groups in the Yemeni Civil War Wikipedia article, referred to as the STC (Southern Transitional Council), GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and the

¹⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Update>

Southern Movement. As we can see in the deliberation timeline (figure 25), a deliberation starter (represented here as Contributor A) posted a message in the personal user page¹⁹ of another prominent article contributor (referred here as Contributor B) in order to attempt to resolve the issues which prompted the ongoing edit war. Contributor B moved the discussion from his/her own personal user page to the talk page of the Yemen Civil War article, thereby involving other possible contributors and observers to participate in the discussion by making it public. The first main problem between both warring contributors is represented by their differing interpretations on the uses and purpose of the article's infobox, accompanied by predication discursive strategy which frames the disputing opponent as non-neutral and an argumentation discursive strategy related to the policy use topos which implies that his interpretation of Wikipedia regulations regarding infoboxes are wrong and therefore must be changed.

“your first reason for removing the STC from the infobox was based on a false assumption about how Wikipedia's infoboxes are meant to be interpreted. Your second was actually just a concealed reversion. Your third was the lack of a reason.”

“but it's just to prevent the infobox from getting too wide basically, and your revisions more importantly completely remove almost all, if not all, references to the STC. There's also used for like, separating parties that aren't really all too involved on the ground and all like the US when they don't have boots on the

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User_pages

ground, and generally organizing things so they'll be nicer-looking” –Contributor A

29/11/2017	Deliberation Start	Contributor A complains about STC removal from the infobox
30/11/2017	First Reply	Contributor B attempts to justify the removal
30/11/2017	Dispute Start	Three more lengthy back and forth responses between Contributors A and B
01/12/2017	ANI Request	Contributor C opens a request in the Administrator's Noticeboard Incidents
06/12/2017	Admin Arrival	Administrator joins the discussion and attempts to set the stage for a consensus seeking process
07/12/2017 - 20/12/2017	Consensus Seeking	Lengthy discussion continues without clear resolution
26/12/2017	RFI Created	A Request for Comment is created for the Southern Transitional Council article
26/12/2017 - 07/03/2018	RFI Expires	Lengthy discussion on the nature of the STC continues without a clear resolution

Figure 25: STC Deliberation timeline

Contributor A, the deliberation starter, thereby declares his/her edits to be dependent on this particular interpretation of the uses of the infobox, while at the same time showing certain animosity towards his/her rival, which is illustrated by the use of expressions such as “false assumption” and “concealed revision”, which connote ignorance and bad faith on the part of Contributor B. On his part, Contributor B mentions the Wikipedia common practice of placing conversation related to the article in the public article talk page.

“I just wanted to tell you that this should have been placed in the article’s talk page as this is common practice, so it provides reference for any future arguments that may occur about this matter.” – Contributor B

Here, one of the important facets of the talk page is illustrated. The opening post of the contributor who started the discussion was placed in the private talk page of the person to whom the complaint was addressed to. The response, however, was moved towards the public talk page of the Yemeni Civil War article on grounds of transparency and future reference. While in this case, the discussion has been made public and easily accessible for all to see, it would be very difficult to find out how many of these discussions end up being resolved in private user talk pages. These pages are publicly accessible in any case, but the

discussions therein have a high chance of going unnoticed. Furthermore, another Wikipedia notion is disputed. In the opening post of the deliberation, Contributor A justifies his/her actions on the basis of Practice on Other Pages power play:

“They have stable mixed control over certain areas such as Aden, recognize Hadi's authority, and so on, so they are properly included in the same column, just as rebel infighting in the Syrian Civil War did not mean that Tahrir al-Sham and Ahrar al-Sham did not belong in the same column, even though they're separated.”- Contributor A

Contributor B however, affirms that an article with enough history or importance will develop its own practices and norms that should not be necessarily comparable to those of other articles, even if they share common attributes. Both contributors share two very different but reasonable understandings on the way precedents should be set (see the following excerpts below).

“you’ve been here long enough to know that with each article there are different practices, and policies that are implemented in particular for that article due to the situation that’s present (An in the Syrian Civil War article’s case we are nearing almost 7 years of this current civil war and the objectives of it have changed numerous times, therefore it’s almost incomparable to the Yemeni Civil War)” – Contributor B

“...yes, when there's new disputes, precedent is a thing across articles. For instance, there was a RfC²⁰ where I participated regarding the DPR and LPR

²⁰ RfC is a request for comment concerning Wikipedia disputes.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_comment

infoboxes where the Syrian opposition was cited as a precedent, although it wasn't of the same nature as this.” – Contributor A

Additionally, the viability of the source is put into question. This is one of the most common practices within content disputes. Once again, both contributors produce rational, albeit opposite understandings on what should be the right course of action. Contributor B starts by questioning the merits of the content by disregarding the reliability of Al-Jazeera as a source through a predication and argumentation discursive strategies which label Al-Jazeera as unreliable and therefore call for action in removing its content.

“how can you justify this edit when your only source comes from Aljazeera, a news media outlet that has a clear political agenda of ruining the Saudi-Led Coalition’s image ever since the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis that occurred in June of this year. Which makes this a clear biased and propaganda news website”
– Contributor B

Contributor A on the other hand, admits that Al-Jazeera does have its particular biases - “Al-Jazeera is clearly painting UAE and the STC in a negative light. I agree.”- but the contributor still defends the legitimacy of the used source despite the perceived political relationship between the Southern Transitional Council and Al-Jazeera as a news media, and affirms that the Wikipedia can accept biased sources when appropriate by using the argumentation discursive practice of policy interpretation, which implies that if a policy can be interpreted in several ways, one should adapt it to suit the goal of the encyclopedia: “Wikipedia accepts biased sources, and I see no reason to see it as such a bad source in regards to the STC”. The discussion about the reliability of Al-Jazeera continues based on interpretations of Wikipedia policy and interpretations of Wikipedia practice. Contributor

B questions the subjectivity involving the acceptance of biased sources on a case-by-case basis, while continuing to accuse Al-Jazeera of explicit bias:

“Lastly, the usage of biased sources, you agree that Aljazeera is at times a biased new media source, but your only argument to that is, biased sources are acceptable in Wikipedia and that Pro-UAE and Saudi Arabia sources are probably more biased. My only rebuttal, or argument in this case to that reasoning, is where can we draw the fine line between questionable sources and biased ones when a person brings the same news media outlet with a different topic at hand with questionable material in that article. Especially when you have a news media outlet (like Aljazeera) that reports based on pure emotion at times and not facts, how can we allow one and not the other?” - Contributor B

Contributor A attempts to enforce his/her argument through the use of Wikipedia policy authority -“Wikipedia's current recognition and consensus that al Jazeera is a reliable source overrides your objections in this case.”- and defend the merits of the source by defining the provided content as neutral and therefore not a subject to bias: “Al Jazeera was used to cite content which is fairly neutral, merely stating that the war has now spread to Socotra and that the UAE is backing the STC.”

As it becomes apparent that the deliberation is not reaching a conclusion, a third contributor (C) joins the discussion and takes the side of the deliberation starter (contributor A) against the removal of the STC. Contributor C proceeds to denounce the reverts perpetrated by contributor B without adding any significant argument to the on-going discussion -“You have no argument to remove STC. I will restaure it. The article could'nt be outdated.”- and after several reverts, calls for a dispute resolution process in the Administrator’s noticeboard incidents (ANI²¹): “Enough is enough. I have made an ANI.” The deliberation becomes a two-on-one edit war about which factions should be

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators%27_noticeboard/Incidents

included in the infobox and whether they should be included at all: "Contributor C and I want to keep the article up-to-date by including who all the factions are" – Contributor A; The deliberations continues in this regard through interpretation of sources –"Also I would recommend that you read your own references that you were using to try to help further your argument" – Contributor B; interpretation of the political situation –"The Southern Movement is a political party and paramilitary organization, per WP:CONSISTENCY, and the Southern Transitional Council is more or less an unrecognized secessionist government for which the Southern Movement fights, as I would interpret the phrase "secessionist body" -- a parliament which has appointed a cabinet, basically." –Contributor A; and semantics – "your connections and references to the Syrian Civil War were way off. I mean they were really off that I won't even address the part where you said, "separate belligerents' recognize the authority of other belligerents". I mean come on, first there is no correlation between the Syrian Civil War and the Yemeni Civil war..."

Finally, an external uninvolved administrator arrives for mediation. The admin agrees with contributor B, stating that he sees no information on the STC's position in the conflict so he cannot warrant it to remain in the infobox due to the No Original Research policy.

“There is zero information in the article describing the STC or its position in the conflict, and until there is, it's not appropriate for it to be listed in the infobox at all. Please see WP:NOR.”

Contributor B, meanwhile thanks the admin for the support but wonders why the article has been removed from Verified User Protection Mode, while accusing contributor C of being emotional on the subject:

“Thank you for seeing it from my position. Although I don't understand why Contributor C, is so emotional he hardly contributed in this debate. Also I realize

for some reason the verified user protection on the Yemeni Civil War was removed, I was wondering if you could put it back?

The admin responds:

“protection is normally only used to stop disruption that is already occurring, not just to prevent disruption that might occur in the future. As long as everyone here is discussing changes and not revert warring as before, I'm comfortable with the page remaining unprotected.”

Thus, the admin joins the conversation from the administrators' noticeboard mediation request process (ANI). The admin himself states that -“I'm not familiar with the dispute here and up to yesterday I didn't know there was a civil war happening in Yemen, but I'll do my best.- The fact that the admin is external to the debate and supposedly has no opinion on the political situation and is at the very least competent in Wikipedia resolution processes as supported by his Wikipedia administrator rank, should in theory help with the credibility, reliability and legitimacy of the resulting article content from the dispute. The process that the admin proposes starts with the following petition:

To start I'm going to ask three things: 1. Please don't revert each other while we work through this. 2. Please focus your comments on article content, not on

things the other editor did. 3. Please only add new comments to the bottom of the thread.

Moreover, the admin warns the participating contributors against further disrupting actions under threat of sanction:

“But my larger goal is to prevent disruption and edit warring, and so I remind you again that this article is subject to discretionary sanctions (see the notice at the top of this page).”

Finally, the admin asks each disputing contributor about the issues they have with the article:

“Could each of you please, briefly if you can and without talking about what another editor did, describe what is correct or not correct in the article with respect to these things?”

Both disputing contributors, A and B, agree on the terms of the dispute, demonstrating that there is no apparent miscommunication or misunderstandings between them and that their respective positions are clear to each other. Their content dispute is therefore based on other underlying factors involving political and news media interpretation, as well as Wikipedia praxis. In response to Contributor B’s description of the situation, Contributor A agrees – “I think these terms are fine”-. Unfortunately, while the admin is analyzing the

article and the discussion, disputing contributors keep making and reverting changes and accusing each other of malpractice.

“I ask for a sanction against Contributor B. He have removed STC without consensus !! Enough is enough” – Contributor C

“But his behavior is unacceptable. Contributor B has started again to edit the article while he is the only one to defend this point of view. There is no consensus for the chnages even though the article has been in a stable state for two weeks. For the rest, it is he who violated the truce for which we agreed not to change anything until a consensus was found. He put us in front of the fait accompli without warning anyone, he took advantage of the fact that there was no more discussion and that it turned out off topic. Contributor A himself said he would no longer discuss his off-topic. And finally, what would be the solution: opening a new ANI? – Contributor C

“Actually Contributor C has been lying this whole time, there was no consensus reached on the module, because if you look at the Module's talk page Contributor C never went to discuss the subject of the Southern Transitional Council before adding it as a belligerent.” – Contributor B

“We'll have to stop this circus. When I added the progress of the STC, no one challenged. The rules of WP are clear: to change something, you need a consensus but in cases where no one reverts a first time, there is no reason to ask the question for anything and everything. And when a change has occurred for months, if someone disputes it, he has to start a discussion to change it. The

addition of the STC dates from October. There is more than enough lies of this Contributor B” – Contributor C

As it can be observed in the above discussion excerpts, Contributor C turns the discussion hostile towards Contributor B while they accuse each other of not respecting Wikipedia rules and their disagreement on the achievement of consensus. At this point, participating contributors and the admin begin to show edit war attrition as observed in the excerpts below. All three participating contributors in addition to the admin imply this in their comments:

“Well, we turned this all into a mess again. To be honest I can't follow the conversation above, there are too many long, rambling comments, ordered lists that don't refer to each other, and abstract examples that don't really have anything to do with this discussion” – Admin

“Can we just end this dispute already? There may be more disputes over the STC in the future but I see the issue of "The STC cannot be in the infobox without content in the article." as essentially done, though disputes about future additions of STC content to this article may be waiting in the near future.” – Contributor A

“I, and certainly believe you guys as well, are not looking for a TBAN to be placed on you, so any proposal, to fix this dispute should resolve all problems that range from this article to the Yemeni module, because not addressing

everything, will certainly just delay another inevitable argument.” – Contributor B

“I propose to made a RfC or ask a mediator to settle the dispute” – Contributor C

After analyzing the article and discussion, the admin proposed to update the content with further information that would warrant the exclusion or inclusion of certain factions into the infobox: -“There is zero information in the article describing the STC or its position in the conflict, and until there is, it's not appropriate for it to be listed in the infobox at all.”- Unfortunately, while contributors agreed to this notion, this only led to more unresolved discussion on the nature of the STC. Therefore, contributors (as seen above) agree for a different resolution process: an official Request for Comment (RfC), which is a process for requesting outside input concerning disputes, policies, guidelines or article content (Wikipedia: Requests for Comment, 2019). The RfC was placed within the talk page of the Southern Transitional Council article. The ongoing discussion mirrored that of the Yemeni Civil War article regarding the nature and existence of the STC among the same three participating contributors. Only three additional comments from other contributors responding to the request were added in order to weigh in on the discussion. Two comments provided interesting insights into Wikipedia praxis, which emphasized the nature of the site as an encyclopedia. RfC Contributor 1 suggested that:

“It boils down to whether you opt for simplicity or accuracy. It's simpler to just label them all as Hadi loyalists, just as it is simpler to label both PUK and KDP forces as yellow in Iraq [...] All in all, to summarize what I'm saying is, I'm only

for making the STC yellow if we're willing to discuss every detail and reach a consensus on straddling issues,”

RfC Contributor 2 expands on this notion by adding that these issues are too complex to be described within the boundaries of an encyclopedia:

“The map has too many colors/factions (8). This makes it too complicated for our viewers. They will get lost with all the factions. This is an encyclopedia, and we should give a quick idea of what is happening to viewers who are not following closely the conflict.”

Ultimately, the discussion comes back to the issues which stated it and has no discernible end result. The external situation changes with new developments in the war due to the Battle of Aden of January 2018 and finally the discussion dies down without consensus while the conflict of the Yemeni War evolves requiring new information to be introduced in the article.

Rational Discourse Analysis:

Truth: What are the basic arguments and are the issues clearly defined? During the admin intervention in search for a conflict resolution, the basic arguments were clearly laid out by Contributor B:

“Ok, to clarify the dispute at the beginning originated due to the addition of the “STC”, and the relocation of the Southern Movement (government sanctioned militia) from being a subordinate to the Hadi-government to being a subordinate to the “STC”. Contributor A also thought that the infobox needed to be updated to specify which countries had more than 1000 troops in Yemen, which I happily compromised with him. In short, the current dispute is why is the “STC” being

added in the infobox when it has been denounced by the Gulf Cooperation Council as not a ally and why are you adding the Southern Movement as a subordinate to the “STC”.

In response to the description, Contributor A agreed to the laid out terms –“I think these terms are fine”. This brief exchange shows that there was no miscommunication regarding the nature and the basic ideas of the dispute.

What evidence has been provided for support and has the information been communicated without distortion or omission? The nature of Wikipedia and the wiki technology based on hyperlinks necessarily forces contributors to always support their content and arguments with external sources. While the dispute may turn into the questioning of the validity, reliability and bias of the sources, it will always show which particular sources were used. However, as the conflict is set in the Middle East, there are plenty of sources written in a language other than English that are used anyway. The language skills of the contributors and the uncertain clarity of google translate may very well distort information: “Furthermore, the Aden Declaration, as apparently poorly translated as it seems, is quite clear on one thing--it's vague”.- Contributor A; “As for what you just linked, as usual, I don't really know what it's saying very well, even in English, because Google Translate didn't do too good a job. – Contributor A; “As for Saleh's forces, this source seems to indicate otherwise, judging from Google Translate”- Admin.

Are there ideological claims which are examined? Al-Jazeera as a source is regarded as an organization with a geo-political agenda, which conditions the value of the information they provide as a news media organization. “how can you justify this edit when your only source comes from Aljazeera, a news media outlet that has a clear political agenda of ruining the Saudi-Led Coalition’s image ever since the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis” – Contributor B; “but al-Jazeera seems to me to have a much more hostile, harsh tone towards UAE/STC than the Hadi/Saudi coalition” - Contributor A. Furthermore, the

objectives of belligerent factions in Yemen are debated among contributors and at times are interpreted in a contradictory manner as seen below.

“my stance is the current way that you structured the infobox made it seem like the “STC” is a whole new separate independent militia/army that is self-sufficient and completely independent from all other belligerents yet is supported by the Saudi-Led Coalition and Hadi. When in reality the only real weapons it has received, were when the Houthis were in Aden and it received its weapons as Government sanctioned militia (known as the Southern Movement) to fight the Houthis and kick them out of Aden and any other Southern Governorates.” – Contributor B

“Even the Houthis haven't explicitly stated that they're backed by Iran, as far as I know, and the Iranian government denies it as well, does it not?” – Contributor A

Sincerity: Use of rhetorical devices, metaphors and adjectives? Within this discussion, there has not been any significant use of rhetorical devices or metaphors in order to convey a particular discourse. However, while the discussion has generally been quite civil, at times, some used expressions such as “concealed revision” or “false assumption” could very well promote hostility by implying that certain contributors have a hidden agenda in their editing behavior.

Do these rhetorical devices, metaphor or adjective choices influence interpretation and do they promote or suppress understanding? The general lack of rhetorical devices and metaphors in the conversation helped reach an understanding of the issues and arguments

raised by both parts of the discussion. Interestingly, a clear understanding of the different points of view did not prevent the dispute and did not help in achieving consensus.

Clarity: Is there a use of jargon, incomprehensible language or unfamiliar terminology? Wikipedia contributors constantly use Wikipedia jargon related to its practices and common features. Wikipedia policies are usually mentioned and represented as acronyms accompanied with hyperlinks which redirect the reader to the appropriate policy page. In this particular case, expressions such as Tban (temporal ban), ANI (administrators' noticeboard incidents) and RfC (requests for comment) were commonly used. Furthermore, acronyms related to the different armed conflict participant organizations are constantly employed (i.e. STC for the Southern Transitional Council or GCC for the Gulf Cooperation Council), which can make it difficult for the audience to properly follow the discussion. However, the talk page is intended for transparency in the article decision-making process, it is not necessarily designed for the encyclopedia user, but rather for Wikipedia contributors. Its main participants and readers are the collaborating and disputing contributors, who are all generally familiar with the used jargon. This can be intimidating for new users, but it has not shown to be a problem in this particular discussion as most new users commonly start with peripheral participation (Bryant, Forte and Bruckman, 2005), and the type of article building content editing disputed in this case is normally done by more veteran full participants who are savvy with necessary Wikipedia jargon.

Legitimacy: Two separate concepts can be considered in the discussion over claims of legitimacy. First, the legitimacy of the platform and its underlying practice in which the discussion takes place (Wikipedia), and second, the legitimacy awarded to the external sources used in order to support the arguments provided by the contributors who have participated in this discussion. Contributors attempt to legitimize their points of view through the use and interpretations of previously consensual Wikipedia policies and guidelines. Deliberating parties generally adhere to Wikipedia policies (Bryant, Forte and

Bruckman, 2005), however, they differ in their interpretations of said policies and may act upon them in different ways (Kriplean et al, 2007). This is illustrated in this dispute through the discussion about the merits of using Al-Jazeera as a reliable source for specific information. Both parties agree on the source to be biased, however, an argument is made which brings up Wikipedia guidelines which cite that a biased source may be used under special circumstances when the information provided is regarded as neutral and this would apply in the context of the STC dispute. This notion is not agreed upon. Finally, a big element of dispute is the recognition of the STC as an existing belligerent faction. Disputing contributors discuss whether factions recognizing each other's authority legitimize their power and influence as actors in the war, thus categorizing them as belligerents. This discussion does not reach a conclusive result.

Who is considered an expert and on what basis? Several international news media and organizations are used as references in the discussion. One of the main mediums regarded as an expert on the topic by one of the main disputing contributors is the Middle East Monitor, a non-profit press monitoring organization largely focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who also writes about other pressing issues in the Middle East. Other Middle Eastern news organizations such as Al-Jazeera, Cairo Review and The National.ae are used in order to provide information. International publications such as Le Monde and Reuters (from the global West) and Xinhuanet (from the global East) are also featured in the discussion. Additionally, several articles from Critical Threats Project, a U.S. think tank which specializes in international threats is used on three occasions within the discussion.

If we consider the possibility of omitted viewpoints from this discussion within a complex civil conflict such as Yemen, which also transcends international borders and influences the region, it is safe to assume that many organizations and institutions which deal with the STCS do not get a voice in regards to the nature of their relationship with the STC in order to properly establish the existence and goals of this organization and whether or not

it can be considered a belligerent faction. The STC's own voice is indeed referenced in the discussion through its own press releases and the Twitter channel of Anis Mansour Al Subaihi, the STC's official speaker. Together with the STC's official channels, Yemen News, is the only other local organization present in the discussion as a form or reference to the provided information. Finally, one of the main problems of omitted voices in the discussion is the lack of knowledge of Arabic language by both disputing parties.

“Can you two both cite more extensively? I have a feeling that at least one of you knows Arabic and can cite much more extensively than I can.” –Contributor A

“Furthermore, I was able to have one of my friends help my find some sources, since in Arabic, generally speaking you should find a lot more information on the war in Yemen. While my Arabic is at best “iffy”.” –Contributor B

This illustrates one of the main problems regarding natural western-centric bias of the English Wikipedia, which (often unintentionally and therefore structurally) ignores non-

western knowledge and information on non-western conflicts, thereby perpetuating a westernized view of the situation and the world in general.

STC Dispute References		International	
Middle East		Europe	
Middle East Monitor	6	Le Monde	1
Al-Jazeera	2	Reuters	1
Cairo Review	1		
The National	1	USA	
		Critical Threats Project	3
		Just Security.org	1
Yemen		Asia	
STC Twitter	1	Xinhuanet	1
STC Official Page	1		
Yemen News	1		
TOTAL	13	TOTAL	7

Figure 26: number of references used in STC dispute

6.2. State owned media vs independent media

In this special case dispute, a prominent contributor in the Yemen Civil War proposes to refrain from using different state-controlled media as sources for citing casualties due to personal and national biases.

“I’ve realized that if this situation is not permanently resolved, that this problem will continue to reoccur as the war continues to drag on and the more casualties continue to be reported on, by different state-controlled media.

My take on the situation is that no state-controlled media, (i.e. Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, etc..) should be used in, citing casualties as obviously their will be biases involved, as each side tries to portray themselves as the victors in this war.” –
Deliberation Starter

Predication and referential discursive strategies play a role from the inception of this discussion. Social actors (Wikipedia contributors) are labeled as biased based on their nationalities –“@****: you attacked @****: for being biased based on his ethnicity, yet whether you like to admit or not we all have our biases” (Deliberation Starter)- and the points of view of contributors are positioned by the deliberation starter while proceeding to use referential discursive strategies which group opposing Wikipedians as Pro-Saudi or Pro-Irani based on their actions:

“for example you repeatedly continue to call the Houthis terrorists”, “so in reality if **** has a biased Pro-Iranian position, because of his ethnicity than you

(****), have a biased Pro-Saudi position, because your actions/words mimic that of Saudi Coalition”

– to which one contributor finds the need to defend against:

“Let alone the fact that everything i said on this encyclopedia is in print and can be checked by everybody. I invite you all to check my editing history if you want, if you find any biased/disruptive edits, i'll be glad to self-revert. Best regards.”

The proposed resolution did not achieve enough supporting votes from the participating contributors. However, an official resolution tag was not placed in the talk page as of 3/13/2019 (the last entry in the discussion is in June 2018). In this case, a contributor brings up the issue that a vote may not be the best way to set a precedent: “Addendum: This is WP:NOTAVOTE!”. By invoking the WP:NOTAVOTE²² guideline, which states that when conflicts arise, they are resolved through discussion, debate and collaboration and polls are generally not used for article development (Wikipedia: Polling is not a substitute for discussion, 2019), the contributor implies that a major practices, such as refraining from using state-owned media to cite casualties should be ratified through consensus and discussion, rather than voting.

Rational Discourse Analysis

Truth: What are the basic arguments? A contributor proposes refraining from using state-owned media from participants in the war in order to cite casualties due to their perceived self-interested biases. A vote is called forth which asks to support or oppose this practice

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Polling_is_not_a_substitute_for_discussion

and provide arguments for each contributor's position. Opposing and supporting arguments are listed in the following figure 27.

The issues were defined at the beginning of the proposal. However, after several votes have been cast, a contributor asks for clarification:

“Your vote proposal is incomplete. Since Al-Arabiya is talking about Saudi losses not Qatari soldiers killed. You should have asked "state-owned media should be used to cite their own country casualties" or "state-owned media of countries that participate int the conflict should be used to cite any combatant casualties".”.

This is provided by the deliberation starter: “Further narrowed, see vote description”. Another contributor finds this process troublesome on the grounds that voting description should not be altered after votes have already been cast

“I have a serious problem with the process here. You can't change what "Support" and "Oppose" mean after several responses have already been posted”.

The deliberation starter justifies the changes:

“I haven't changed what "support" and "oppose" means I just further elaborated and the essences of the subject is still the same, as the user felt it was too vague”.

This situation can be considered as distorted communication, since it as apparent that the premise of the vote can easily be changed after votes were forwarded without contributors

noticing the issue. This notion is attempted to be disregarded by the deliberation starter on the basis of the voting result “Anyways the vote looks like it's going to fail”.

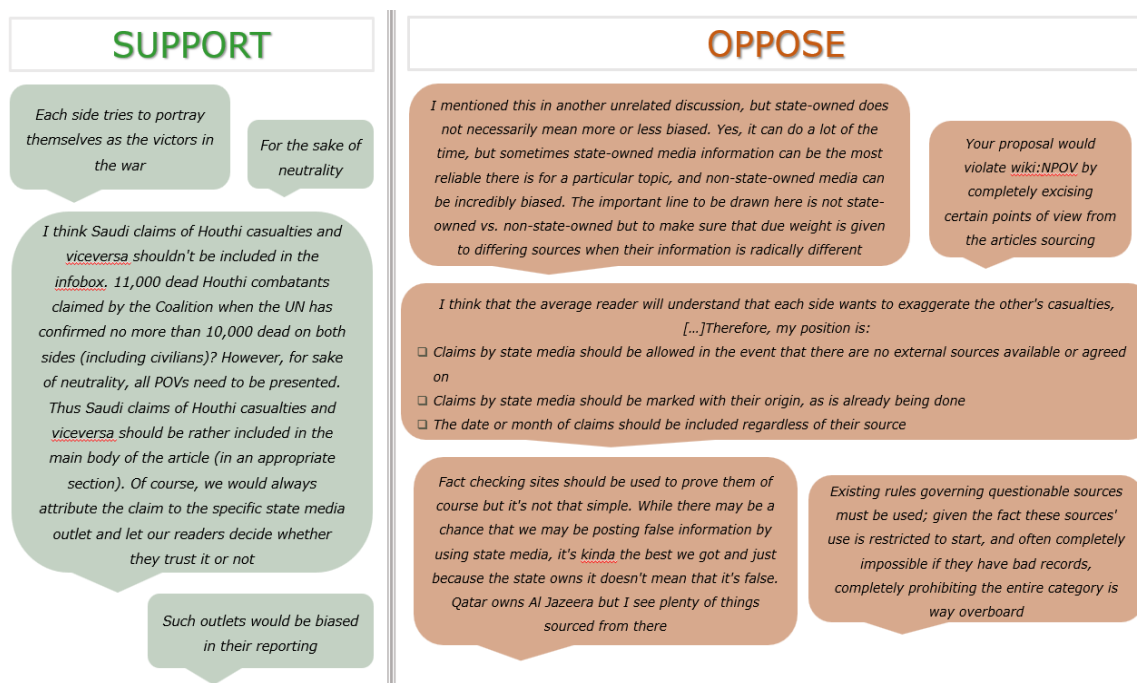


Figure 27: Arguments provided for the state-owned media poll.

Are there ideological claims which are examined? The nature of state bias in providing death casualties for their own and their rival's troops and civilians, the determination of who and what are considered to be neutral sources which could provide agreed-upon

reliable data, and its relationship to Wikipedia's Neutral Point of View policy are put to the test in this deliberation.

Sincerity: In this deliberation, the WP:QUESTIONABLE²³ and WP:BIASED²⁴ guidelines are used as rhetoric for the purpose of attacking an argument which has used the adjective "terrorist" in order to address the Houthi faction. The argument for choosing to use terrorist as an adjective influences information interpretation and how other contributors react to the information provided by the contributor that uses it. Additionally, it contributes to framing Houthis as such with the use of a predication discursive strategy and nomination discursive strategy through the use of actionyms.

"I consider the Houthis as terrorists (although I used rebels if I am not wrong as well) (as I do with every "rebel movement in the Middle East that wages an armed conflict against the ruling government", including in Syria and elsewhere) due to their track record, slogans (death to the US, Israel, Jews etc.) and the way they have hijacked an entire country (Yemen) using force. After all they are the ones that started this conflict by conducting a coup d'état against the Yemeni government back in September 2014 long before any non-Yemeni involvement. Moreover, the Houthis also employ a "Takfiri language" against their opponents,

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources#Questionable_and_self-published_sources

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources#Biased_or_opinionated_sources

calling them apostates in a similar manner to ISIS and other terrorist groups in the region and wider "Muslim world".”

The use of such adjectives and the use of Wikipedia guidelines in response politicize the discussion and steer it away from Wikipedia’s search for the Neutral Point of View.

Clarity: As mentioned in the previous deliberation case regarding the Southern Transitional Council, Wikipedia uses its own jargon with which veteran contributors are familiar with. It may be a problem for new users or external observers, but it does not seem to affect conversation between veteran disputing editors. Al-Jazeera is on one occasion referred to as “AJ”, and it requires clarification: “...but Al Jazeera (presuming AJ is them...).

Legitimacy: Here, legitimacy is not sought from external sources. The goal of this vote is to seek consensus in order to install and formalize a new practice applicable to the ongoing development of this article. The opening post of the deliberation seeks to legitimize the proposal by asking for the opinion of participating contributors who have been contributing to the development of the article, chosen by the deliberation starter. As this is an open discussion, if a contributor is monitoring the article, he/she may participate in the consensus-seeking process as well. However, only one contributor who was not directly addressed in the opening post chose to participate by voting and providing arguments for his/her position on the matter. Additionally, only 10 out of 23 addressed contributors

participate in the poll. Finally, one contributor refused to participate on the grounds of understanding herself to be a peripheral editor:

“Uh, hi guys. My only contribution in this area is fixing formatting in April.
@****: I have no idea what this debate is about, but I'd suggest you stop pinging
random users about it. Cheers!”.

Regarding how decisions are legitimized, as it can be observed in figure 19, the arguments which are opposed to the proposition are strong enough to prevent consensus, thereby delegitimizing the potential article practice of refraining from using war participant state-media to cite casualties.

6.3. Framing the war

The case of finding consensus for the title of the War in Donbass article highlights the importance of naming armed conflicts and the influence that a small community of Wikipedia contributors can have on general knowledge about an armed conflict. One of the main contributors of the article puts it best while identifying himself through referential discursive strategy as a Wikipedian through the description of in-group practice (“that’s why **we** use war”), and implying that those who use what he understands to be “POV bits” are not considered proper Wikipedians:

“there are multiple points of view. All call it a "war", but some call it a proxy war, some call it a civil war, some call it a direct war with Russia. The article has a section on that. That's why we use "war", as that is a neutral description that

everyone can agree on. We can't, however, add the POV bits "proxy", "civil", or "direct", if we want to be neutral.”

Therefore, the Wikipedia article on the War in Donbass could have the power to define the conflict in very different ways, if adjectives such as proxy, civil or direct are used in the title. The only curators of this information are the contributors themselves and their ability to find consensus among opposing views on the nature of the Ukrainian conflict. The outcome of such discussion can reinforce or shatter Wikipedia’s structural credibility and its ability to provide neutral encyclopedic knowledge to its users all around the globe.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict, a stream of inconsistent information coupled with fake news, propaganda, political and social activist agendas blurred the ability of the average news consumer to discern fact from fiction, and thereby effectively shrouding the conflict in an information fog of war (Khaldarova, Pantti, 2016). Thus, it was neither clear nor obvious as to how to proceed with the naming of the article which would attempt to address the conflict while bearing Wikipedia’s Neutral Point of View stance. A proposal to change the title of the article from “2014 insurgency in Donbass” to “Russo-Ukrainian War” spurred a consensus seeking process which ended up proposing several variations of possible titles, each with its supporting and opposing factions within the contributors. Arguments for and against diverse titles such as War in Donbass, Russo-Ukrainian War, Ukrainian Civil War and Ukrainian anti-terrorist Operation were displayed and every proposal with the exception of War in Donbass was quickly discredited with compelling arguments.

First, the proposal of Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation as an article title which labeled participants in the Ukrainian conflict as “Terrorists” and used a point of view topos argumentation strategy which implied that if sources are official, even if they are considered to be biased, their information should be included. This argument was quickly dismissed on grounds of bias, lack of neutrality and scope, and most importantly, lack of

provided sources, as the contributor claims this to be the official name without supplying references.

“I suggest the article be renamed to "2014 Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation".
That is the official name of the conflict in Ukraine”

There were 10 contributors who opposed this particular proposal and none provided support. One of the opposing contributors addresses most common discrepancies with this proposed title using several argumentation topoi regarding points of view and neutrality which implied that if sources are not considered to be neutral, or are considered to be biased, they should be discarded:

“Another one-sided title, and a totally ridiculous one at that. It doesn't even encapsulate the scope of the article. What's more, this proposed title is not the "official name of the conflict in Ukraine". It is the name of a government

operation against the insurgents as part of a larger war. What's more, it is hopelessly lacking in neutrality.”

Second, the original proposal which started the deliberation was changing the title of the article to Russo-Ukrainian War. This proposal was made on the basis of Russo-Georgian naming convention and confirmation of Russian involvement

“With the recent confirmation that Russia is involved, I think "Russo-Ukrainian War" should be the title of the article. This was is very similar to the Russo-Georgian War, in which Russia is siding with two breakaway states.”.

However, this proposal is strongly opposed by several contributors on the grounds of lack of reliable sources, the scope of the conflict, and Russia’s participation in the conflict being considered an allegation at the moment of this deliberation

“Can't make up your mind about who's fighting who, eh? Is it Russia against Ukraine, or a "civil war" between Ukrainians? I've never seen a more flippant proposal, and it isn't at all backed by reliable sources”

“concerning to the 2nd suggestion, the insurgency is limited to Donbass, not all Ukraine.”-;

“ we can't rename an article based on allegations”.

One of the main contributors to the article attempts to explain the task of writing from a Neutral Point of View in the context of the Donbass conflict:

“At the moment, it is a matter of point of view. Ukrainian media and government both consider this a direct war with Russia. I've spoke to some people in Donetsk, and they agree with this assessment. They say there are no actual separatists, just "Little Green Men" and forcible conscripts. Note that the Ukrainian Wikipedia page for this event is written in that manner. Of course, this is all original research, nothing worth basing an encyclopaedia article on. Russia portrays it, on the other hand, as a civil war between two different indigenous Ukrainian forces. The Russian Wikipedia page is written in that manner. The thing is, it isn't our job to pick and choose between the available options floating around. We've got to report what reliable sources say. At the moment, both "civil war" and "war against Russia" are not the common names. The word "war" is sometimes used, but usually in a vague sense. I've found that the word "conflict" is much more common than war. Regardless, that's a different discussion.”

Thus, part of Wikipedia's own contributors and curators are aware of their role as creators of an encyclopedia based on collaborative effort of anonymous users. However, at the same time this statement addresses the need to avoid partisan state bias, both from Ukraine and Russia, but does not address the possible bias of what the contributor defines “reliable sources” without further justification for their reliability.

Ukrainian Civil War is the third discussed option on the basis of some Western Media labeling the conflict as such. As the Washington Post and the Red Cross are considered by the community as a reliable source in this context, the proposition is put forward:

“This article by the washington post describes that conflict as a civil war, since the amount of casualties has exceeded 1,000. Even though it only takes place in

Donetsk and Lugansk, it still describes it as one.”, “The Red Cross officially recognizes the conflict as a civil war now”.

However, this argument is confronted on the basis that other sources also recognized as reliable dispute the claim that the conflict can be considered a civil war. Therefore, it is interpreted that including “civil war” in the title of the article would not adhere to the Neutral Point of View, as expressed by this contributor:

“Any inclusion of "civil war" is not neutral. Many sources contest the idea of it being a civil war, and these include the American Department of Defence, NATO, and various others, such as that New York Times article and the Kyiv Post article above. "War" is an objective description, at this point. Whether it is a proxy war or civil war is up for debate, and a matter of PoV.”

Finally, the proposed title War in Donbass, gathered the highest deliberation participation. Proponents of the title argue that this title is “recognizable, concise and precise”, and that the media use the adjectives “war” and “conflict” but find discrepancies on whether using the word “civil” is appropriate

“I think something like "War in Donbass" might be appropriate. There is a lot of use of "war" and "conflict". "Civil" is contested and a matter of POV, so that must be left out. As the "war" is confined to Donbass, I think the regional clarification is needed. I'd think that this title would be a nice WP:NDESC title. It is neutral, it describes the situation adequately, it is recognisable, concise, and precise.”

Furthermore, “Calling the rebels "insurgents" is very POV and gives this article a strongly pro-West bias.”, as “insurgents” is an adjective laden with political meaning to which different belligerent factions, political parties or nations might not ascribe. Finally, War in

Donbass is seen as the most neutral title among contributors, as it chooses the most accepted definitions and geographical nouns which address the state and the scope of the conflict while reducing the impact of political struggle for meaning:

“There are multiple points of view. All call it a "war", but some call it a proxy war, some call it a civil war, some call it a direct war with Russia. The article has a section on that. That's why we use "war", as that is a neutral description that everyone can agree on. We can't, however, add the POV bits "proxy", "civil", or "direct", if we want to be neutral.”

However, the search for consensus around the title of War in Donbass was not without detractors. The first opposed argument challenged the definition of “war”:

“Deeply POVed, because by definition, war is carried out by the states, not by a group of local rebels against a central government.”; “I don't think this really meets the definition of a war. The current name is better than this”.

The second opposing argument was related to the name of the region:

“Secondly per Wikipedia:Article titles "Article titles should be recognizable": Most people do not know that a part of Eastern Ukraine is called "Donbass"”.

In this case, the discussion is related to the scope of the War and the recognition that the name of the region has in common knowledge. Some contributors felt that while Donbass was a good approximation to the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, where the conflict was held, it was not recognizable enough as the Ukrainian armed conflict of 2014 for Wikipedia users, and that Eastern Ukraine (even though this name includes Kharkiv where there is no armed conflict) would be better suited for usability purposes. Eventually consensus was established for War in Donbass, as contributors convinced each other to support this article

title. The heading of the long deliberation summarizes the outcome and justifies the change as follows:

“The result of the move request was: moved to War in Donbass. OK, so clearly the other proposals (Russo-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian Civil War, Ukrainian Anti-Terrorist Operation) don't have a consensus, the only one that got a significant amount of support was to move to "War in Donbass". In that particular section, there is a clear numerical majority in favour of that term. In addition, there is a consensus that: "war" is neutral in this case because there are ample reliable sources describing it as such and it meets the dictionary definition of the term; "2014" is unnecessary disambiguation because there is no other "War in Donbass" that has a Wikipedia article; that "Donbass" is still the most correct term we can use because "eastern Ukraine" and "south-eastern Ukraine" both

inaccurately reflect the scope of the conflict; and that, overall, "War in Donbass" is the most accurate WP:NDESC term at the moment.”

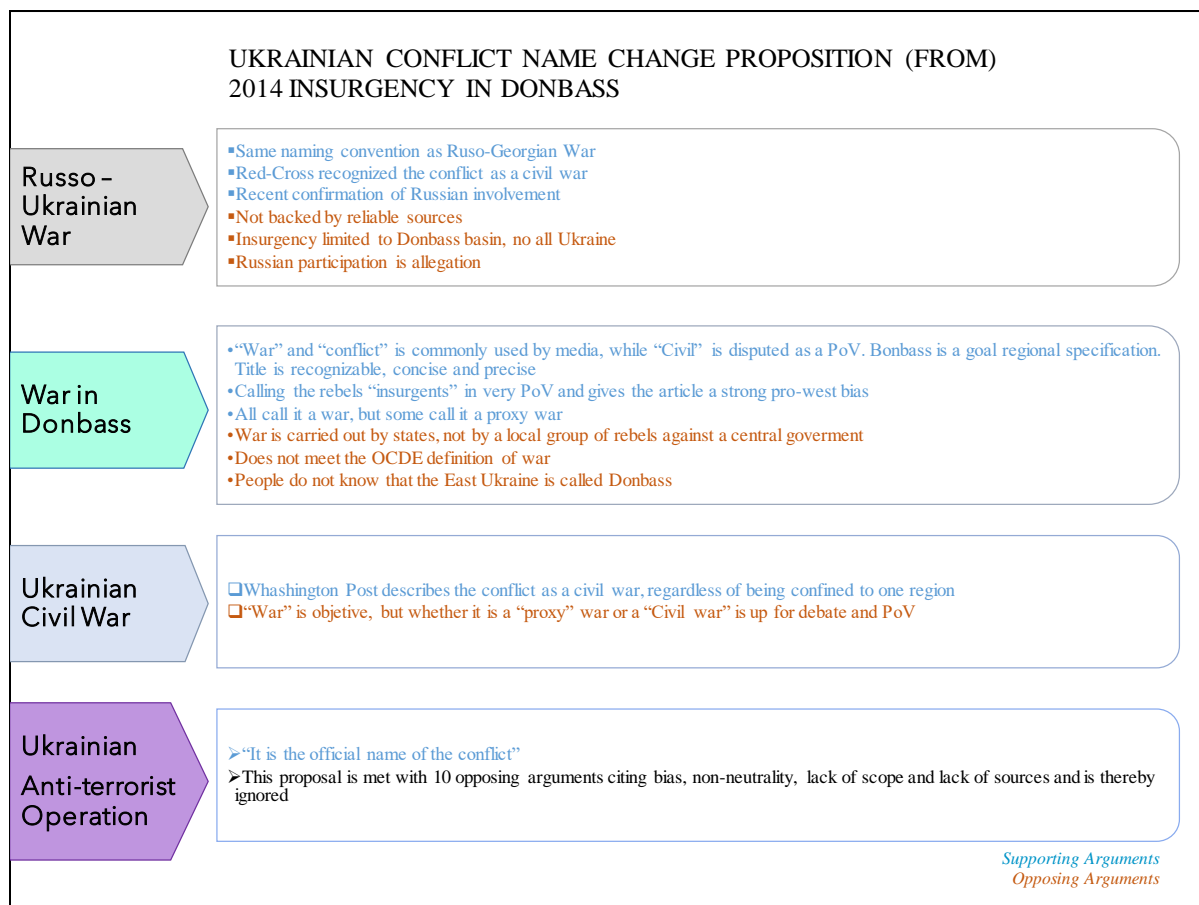


Figure 28: Ukrainian Conflict Name Change Arguments

Truth: The start of the deliberation is prompted by the notion that “2014 insurgency in Donbass” is not an appropriate title given the current events (at the time of the proposal). The basic arguments involve first, the definition of the conflict: is it a war, an insurgency, a rebellion, a civil war or a proxy war? Second, it involves the scope of the conflict by asking whether it is a war between Russia and Ukraine, a civil war within Ukraine, within Eastern Ukraine, or just the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The main issues with the argument are related to point of view and the capacity of the community to maintain Wikipedia’s stance on Neutral Point of View. Participant contributors are aware of these

challenges, but they might not necessarily agree on the correct course of action. In regards to information being committed without distortion or omission, some contributors can be considered disruptive to the communication and collaborative knowledge building process, e.g. the “Ukraine Anti-Terrorist Operation” title proposal which was made by an unsigned account with no supporting evidence to its “that is the official title” claim. Otherwise, most arguments are supported by different sources from mainstream media organizations. In regards to ideological claims, the idea that Russian involvement has been confirmed (at the time of the deliberation) is disputed as being alleged or faction, depending on the point of view of Wikipedians and their used sources.

Sincerity: Are there any uses of rhetoric devices, metaphors or adjectives which affect interpretation and understanding of the conflict? The main discussion revolves around which adjectives are suitable for the purpose of describing and defining the conflict. Wikipedians agree on what words like “proxy”, “civil” or “direct” as applied to “war” mean. What they struggle with is not the misunderstanding of the expressions themselves, but rather, on what the conflict actually is, and which adjectives are appropriate to define it. This is a matter of contention for journalists and academics alike (Khaldarova, Pantti, 2016), yet Wikipedians feel compelled to solve this riddle in order to proceed with the article development, a practice which goes beyond the responsibilities of an encyclopedia. However, a title still needs to be produced and therefore this issue becomes a contradiction between the need to create encyclopedic content and the necessity to define conflicts (a task not suitable for an encyclopedia) in order to proceed with article development. Furthermore, during the discussion involving title propositions, some adjectives such as “flippant proposal” attempt to discredit an opinion, while personal recounts of “Little Green men” (alluding to Russian undercover soldiers with unmarked uniforms) situated in

Donbass are brought up without the burden of proof, creating communication distortions in detriment to a sincerity claim.

Clarity: As mentioned in the previous two special deliberation cases, the validity claim of clarity is rarely applicable to Wikipedia written text. At most, communication might lead to confusion as different Wikipedians have different levels of English language comprehension. However, given that this is the English language Wikipedia, most contributors participate in the discussion according to their own argumentative capacity. Confusions over language have not been observed so far in the research. The important notion is the use of Wikipedia argon represented by the use and reference to Wikipedia policies, where veteran Wikipedians wield them skillfully in order to support their own arguments. When contributors are not savvy to this practice, their potential influence over content becomes lower.

Legitimacy: As Wikipedian content is based on proper sourcing of information, its legitimacy is directly dependent on the media from which information is extracted. Legitimacy is granted to sources and in turn, sources are used to legitimize information. Thus, different sources with different points of view are used in order to legitimize their claims. Ukrainian media considers the conflict a war with Russia, the Red Cross considers the conflict to be a civil war, and the American Department of Defense, Nato, New York times and an article from the Kyiv post contest the idea of civil war. All of these legitimacy claims come from Wikipedians who use these sources for this purpose without direct challenge to their legitimacy, but with challenges to their points of view. In the end, the legitimization of content comes from use of Wikipedian policy and establishment of Wikipedian consensus which is prioritized over any traditional media point of view, whether it is Western, Ukrainian, Russian or International. A small group of Wikipedian

contributors thereby legitimize themselves through their consensus-seeking process the definition of the nature and scope of the Ukrainian conflict.

In regards to what is assumed or implied in the discourse, particular understandings of Wikipedia practice are constantly used as a tool in order to support arguments through a discursive practice which involves the interpretation topos, which implies that if a policy can be interpreted in different ways, one should adapt it to suit the goals of the encyclopedia. Decisions are thereby legitimized by what Wikipedians do, supported by their policies and regulations and the accepted common goal of searching for the Neutral Point of View. On the other hand, those propositions which are deemed to go against the Neutral Point of view are quickly discarded, even if the discussion regarding what is considered to be neutral goes on.

7. Interview analysis

The interview analysis collects data regarding this thesis' aim to understand how Wikipedians experience their involvement in the discussion regarding controversial Wikipedia articles about ongoing armed conflicts. With the help of 14 interviews from Wikipedians who have participated in the editing process contentious socio-political article described in previous chapters, I intend to address research questions 3a, b and c by unveiling specific concerns which Wikipedians have about the knowledge creation process, the importance and influence which Wikipedia has in society according to Wikipedians, and how participation in the collaborative creation of the encyclopedia is understood by the participants themselves within this controversial geo-political context. From transcribed interview data, with the help of a thematic analysis, I extract Wikipedian concerns, specific practices within the site, and their recounted experiences with the collaboration process in which they participate which are found to be common to all interviewees. In this way, the interview analysis does not need to quantify differences of opinions, but rather illustrate the opinions on topics over which all interviewees worry. Topics are grouped based initial open coding of transcribed data, which saw a clear division of discussion genres within Wikipedian motivation, their relationships with media and communications, their relationships with rules and their interpretations, their concerns regarding the site and finally their relationship with geopolitics. A second coding session was done to establish patterns on common themes that interviewees have brought up during interviews and specify items discussed within. The resulting items are described below and are analyzed sequentially throughout the chapter.

First, Wikipedian motivations to take part in specifically contentious, controversial articles about ongoing armed conflicts are discussed; together with the relationships they establish among themselves and the ideal qualities of collaborators which participants value. Second I discuss the notions which Wikipedians have about the relationship between Wikipedia and mainstream media, and the influence they have on each other. Additionally, the

practical way in which Wikipedians maneuver through the encyclopedia's bureaucracy and their understanding and interpretation of what the Neutral Point of View means for them, and how it is applied. Furthermore, I reveal multiple concerns which Wikipedians have with the project despite its original noble purpose. I discuss contributor stress, opinions on the roles and actions of administrators, the possibility of advocacy and special interest groups infiltrating the site and strategies which contributors have used in order to undermine and disrupt the collaborative efforts in the editing process. Finally, I discuss the relationship between Wikipedians, the encyclopedia, and the geo-political context in which this dissertation is set.

7.1. Wikipedians: Motivation and Community

This theme speaks about why Wikipedians contribute and why they are interested in the collaboration processes that the site provides. They discuss their relationships with fellow Wikipedians, and give their opinions on what qualifies as a good Wikipedian.

7.1.1. Altruism

As mentioned in the literature review, research shows that most Wikipedia contributors have a commitment to the improvement of the project for their own altruistic reasons. Prasarnphanich and Wagner (2009) showed that collective motives prevail over individualistic motivation and Baytiyeh and Pfaffman (2010) have found through interviews that altruism is one of the most important factors for administrators and regular contributors alike (Zhu, 2008; Yang and Lai, 2010; Nov and Kuk, 2008). These motivations still prevail over the interviewed subjects within our chosen contentious

articles about on-going armed conflicts. Contributors express their motivations in terms of giving back to society through volunteer work which they consider useful:

“I felt like I had something to give and I gradually became more involved”

“I have an enormous amount of respect for many fellow Wikipedia editors because they have to lead lives of their own and this is all volunteer work. At the end of the day we are all just people who want to add information...”

They are also motivated by the possibility of leaving something behind, contributing to knowledge and develop a sense of self-worth and self-efficiency (Timme Bisgaard Munk, 2009):

“I found consolation on my best (IMHO) contribution to WP, the article about the so-called South Armagh sniper... In a very grim morning, what kept me "afloat" was the thinking that when both, me and the sniper (Michael Caraher) will be dead, people will remember us for what I wrote about him. Weird, but that was the beginning of my recovery”

“my personal interest in WP is to left the knowledge of our generation to be known by other people in the time for being. A sort of intellectual legacy from the last non-technological generation in history”

“I am doing some development of internet information resources in "real life", although this is not my main interest. So, I am using WP just as my own resource(s), meaning that I care about it and I create some pages and add content

because I am going to use this content with links myself or because I think this is something interesting or really important that people need to know.”

And in the specific case of our articles of study, an interest for history and geo-politics, which can also be seen in the personal talk pages of many of the contributors that choose to participate in articles on armed conflicts:

“I started being interested in Wikipedia at the start of the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006. You could say I simply drifted to Wikipedia at that moment. And since then I have stuck around. But even before then I was highly interested in geo-politics”

7.1.2. Relationships

As mentioned in the literature review, Wikipedia is a community (Konieczny, 2009), and as such, its members establish relationships with each other and participate together in the process of knowledge creation. Without constant collaboration from enthusiastic Wikipedians, the free, open access, online encyclopedia would not be possible. As one interviewee puts it, his job would not be possible without assistance:

“My last three years of work in WP (or more) have been possible because of his assistance. I know that he will continue his job undeterred if a leave for a day or two.”

Thus, a common direction is required for coproduction (Lee, Cole, 2003), which would not be possible without productive relationships to be established by the site’s members. Fortunately, it seems that collaborative motives trump individualistic motivations among Wikipedians (Prasarnphanich, Wagner, 2009), creating an opportunity for deliberative,

online democracy (Hilbert, 2009; Klemp, Forcehinmes, 2010). Indeed, Wikipedians work well when they manage to establish an enjoyable collaborative environment, as expressed by an interviewee when asked about positive aspects of Wikipedia:

“The collaborative environment. The – on good days – facts- and source-based discussions. The feeling of contributing to something larger that helps to spread knowledge and, hopefully, empower people thereby”

Necessary positive relationships are prompted by the possibility to recognize each other’s work as illustrated in the following two comments:

“I feel recognized for my work here, that's priceless to me. As I told you, I found myself collaborating with people that is on the opposite side of the river, and we have reached a consensus anyway, Even on the Irish conflict.”

“and of course with Wikipedia you could also thank an editor, you could send them a thanks for a particular edit did I do enjoy getting those and I sometimes send some of them myself because it's kind of like a little, it's a little token you

know it's like oh well this edit got someone to really appreciate the work that you've done”

These relationships allow Wikipedians to practice honing their skills in regards to teamwork and collaboration, which makes them enjoy the process of being a Wikipedian:

“The second one is that you can practice teamwork in wiki”

“I always feel good when that happens (consensus) because it just shows that we can all get along even if we have disagreements on certain issues or different parts of an article”

However, Wikipedians are also careful who they collaborate with, as consensus-seeking processes can quickly turn into disputes and dissent. These fears are expressed by interviewed Wikipedians as well, who generally seem to understand Wikipedia as a collaborative environment but express that they have to carefully choose who to

collaborate with when they are asked about the environment found within the collaboration process:

“Generally productive, with most editors being reasonable, but one minor groups always stays subjective and disrupts the flow. And the disruptions can be either small or large. Based on how much support they have”

“The ones who stick to Wikipedia's policy and verifiable reliable sources very good. With the others I always try to compromise until a point”

In extreme cases, collaboration might become impossible, as implied by this interviewee, problems with collaboration are unavoidable:

“This is the place where everyone can edit. *Everyone*. Do you really want to collaborate with users X, Y, Z?”

7.1.3. *The Good Wikipedian*

Wikipedians recognize one another, and they have clear standards regarding what they respect about fellow contributors and what they wish to see in people with which they have to collaborate in order to develop articles. The most important aspect lies in the main quality of a Wikipedian, which is the tireless, relentless volunteer work and effort put into the improvement of society. As seen in the following interviewee answers, fellow

Wikipedians respect this volunteer work, respect a commitment to the production of accessible information and respect the desire to fill knowledge gaps where required.

“I have an enormous amount of respect for many fellow Wikipedia editors because they have to lead lives of their own and this is all volunteer work. At the end of the day we are all just people who want to add information”

“Anybody that wants, that has knowledge in a topic area and they want to contribute articles and they write articles and they fill a knowledge gap, and they make information that otherwise would not be accessible to people, that is really a valuable thing”

“Because it really does fill a gap in people’s knowledge and ability to understand history and I really value that work”

Because collaborative projects do not exist without the presence of conflict (Elliot, Scacchi, 2003), a valued quality in a good Wikipedian lies in his or her ability to collaborate respectfully, even in disagreement:

“Respecting other people's contributions, working towards a common goal, trying to find common ground and compromises when possible and disagreeing respectfully when it is not. “

7.2. Wikipedians, Media and Communications

In this theme, Wikipedians commend Wikipedia’s role in contributing to the free access of information, at the same time as they alert on its possible dangers. They express their relationships with the concepts of reliable, mainstream media, and how it influences

Wikipedia content, and ponder in on the influence which Wikipedia potential has on traditional media in turn.

7.2.1. Access to Information

The principles of Wikipedia, which are based on a collaborative effort to provide free, easy to access knowledge (Konieczny, 2009), are one of the main attributes that attract contributors to its cause. When asked about Wikipedia's role in society, contributors generally agree that Wikipedia is an invaluable tool for free knowledge dissemination. They highlight its qualities of a free repository of knowledge, and its ability to bring people together in search of a common goal:

“I do very much like the idea that everybody should have access, easy access, to information about any subject. This is very important and it is a very good thing that people have that access and, at the moment Wikipedia is the way that people get that,”

“this is the amazing thing about WP: it's free. It's not a subscription based network that you have to... oh for 10 \$ a month or whatever you can do this and get all this book of knowledge that you've ever wanted [...] ultimately WP is supposed to be a free encyclopedia and that's why people come together and try to edit articles and some editors add more than others and they have different sections of interest [...] in a way it's just about adding information together as a society, which is a very cool thing,

Additionally, Wikipedia can be valued as a pedagogical tool which can teach users critical thought. An interviewed Wikipedian expresses this through the understanding of academic writing, but this can also be extended to the use of new technologies and social networks in order to learn and actively participate in civil society, while another interviewed

Wikipedian alludes to the power of the online encyclopedia to provide a starting point for research for any given topic, even if users do not have to consider the information they find to be necessarily true:

“its real value is to make people, specially millennials and younger people to understand the importance of sources and good research”.

“it doesn’t claim to be a source of truth, it doesn’t claim to be a source of sole correct narrative because it’s not, but it can be useful for people. I feel like one of the most useful things that people use Wikipedia for is if they go to an article, maybe they don’t necessarily trust whatever is written in the article, but at least they can go to the bibliography and take out a few books from there. And even that is fine, that’s perfectly fine and so that’s where Wikipedia is good”

The possibilities of educational use of Wikipedia (Brailas et al., 2015; Moy et al., 2010) are expressed through the experiences of this interviewee, highlighting the importance of the site as a repository of knowledge and a community of collaborative knowledge creation which can be used as a learning environment, not only for users who seek information, but also for Wikipedians who participate in the community:

“Also, reading up on something and finding incredibly detailed articles on topics I had barely heard about before, and (nowadays) being able to rely on (most of) them being reasonably well-sourced and reliable”

“Also, you will learn many things from news, books etc, since you have to read carefully before using a source”

However, contributors also warn where Wikipedia’s intentions may fall short. While participants seem to agree on the value of Wikipedia’s principles, they are very aware of

the inherent dangers that the free encyclopedia project presents despite admitting that Wikipedia's contribution to society is already substantial:

“has greatly contributed to spreading knowledge, even considering all its limitations”

“Wikipedia should²⁵ be a global encyclopedia that anyone can have access to [...] But, due to this, I think that Wikipedia's editors should leave their personal points of view at the door if they want to edit Wikipedia's article.”

“and that is very problematic in many respects, but, at the very least, the principles of the project are noble,”

Finally, an interviewee points out that Wikipedia, in the context of ongoing socio-political articles such as armed conflicts can be understood not an encyclopedia, but as a free open-access “Neutral news aggregator” where citizens, and not journalists act as content curators and a showcase of generally reliable information obtained through mass collaboration:

it's one of the premier projects on the internet showcasing what mass-scale collaborative volunteer work can achieve”

7.2.2. *Reliability of Mainstream Media*

Wikipedia's content is based directly on the sources it uses in order to generate information for its articles. While Wikipedia's reliability has been studied extensively in multiple fields and from different perspectives (see Lavsa et al., 2011; Jemielniak and Aibar, 2016 and Anthony et al., 2009), Wikipedian experience in dealing with reliability translates to

²⁵ The undelining is mine, for emphasis.

negotiating the inclusion and exclusion of source based on their collectively perceived reliability. An interviewee claims that in spite of personal opinions and biases to which every Wikipedian is subject, the encyclopedia's purpose is to represent what mainstream media portrays:

“So, reliable sources had started to call it a war, and so it clearly was a war”

“I don't necessarily take everything that has been written as gospel, but, the principle on which we participate in the project is to follow the policies and the policies clearly say that Wikipedia is based on reliable sources and we report only what they say, we don't insert our own research, we don't editorialize, we simply recount what they say and there are specific definitions on what is reliable source”

While everyone might have different interpretations regarding the subjects in which they are collaborating, and even if information from reliable sources may be questionable, the only way to move forward with article development and the process of consensus-seeking is to follow reliable sources despite its possible contradictions because it is the only way to achieve a coherent narrative. This is expressed in the following comments:

“this is what we are supposed to be doing and whether we agree or not, that is the principle on which we do it and the reason why we do it is because if we do not use these so called reliable sources is because if we didn't we wouldn't have a coherent narrative to actually present to the reader”

“we are based on reliable sources and that is the narrative that we are going to portray, and of course that is problematic in its own regard but that is the only

way that the project can actually work because otherwise, there is no way to actually give information”

In this sense, the use of reliable media poses some problems and contradictions for Wikipedian practice. Some Wikipedians claim that having reliable sources is not enough, and that sometimes they might work in detriment to article content, as expressed below:

“But I work really hard that they do not influence my objective interpretation of cold facts. And of course, it all needs to be backed up by reliable sources. But that doesn't mean that sources linked with the warring sides should be excluded”

“even reliable sources tend to be wrong sometimes and unfortunately they don't go back to correct it, same thing with so called unreliable sources and then you have the issue with people not knowing what to believe and articles getting tagged of being not reliable and so on and so forth but at the same time, articles need to have multiple perspective because if we rely on only so called reliable sources then this, and I of course try to get as many reliable sources as I can, but sometimes, just having reliable sources isn't enough on Wikipedia articles that I have noticed because they don't present the other side and this is the issue.”

Some Wikipedians then express that reliable mainstream sources are also Points of View, and that they will affect content neutrality. First, a reliable source might be reliable for some but not for others, second, one side might be under-represented because its own

media is considered unreliable, and last, reliable sources can also be used with specific agendas from Wikipedians:

“Each one of them presents sources that to them is considered reliable and a reliable source there may not be the same reliable source as it is here”

“there is the articles about the separatist side, there is the articles that talk about them in more detail, I added information to them a lot and I did it only because I’m trying to add reliable information that even if for example is sometimes considered unreliable by some people”

“I did try removing Gerasimov from the article completely but since the issue here is that the Kiev post is considered also a reliable source, so because of this it can’t be removed, so it has to stay there”

Finally, some interviewed Wikipedians show concerns about what Graham (2015) has determined to be uneven geographies of Wikipedia, by stating that mainstream source will

not care about fringe conflicts, and that the use of mainstream media can become a restriction for knowledge from the peripheries:

“I think there are some important POVs which are being ignored by reliable source and there are some-others being exaggerated by them”

“so you are restricted by reliable sources and not all over the world are having same situation with regard to things like recording, publishing, news and media”

“American civil wars are extensively covered by reliable sources you will not have troubles finding various POVs on what happened but, do you think something is true for incidents happened in other parts of the world? I don't think so”

In conclusion, reliability of mainstream media is one of the key concerns of Wikipedia, and while all interviewees admit that negotiating with mainstream media has its challenges and contradictions, the ways in which they interpret their role as editors of an encyclopedia in relation with the use of mainstream media differ.

7.2.3. Wikipedian Influence on Media

As mentioned in the section regarding the relationship of Wikipedians and their struggles with the use of reliable media, mainstream sources determine Wikipedia content. However, and perhaps more importantly, Wikipedians worry that Wikipedia might influence traditional media in turn. We only have to begin with the notion that Wikipedians,

information seekers and influential actors alike are all aware of the importance and public reach of Wikipedia content, as expressed by the interviewee below:

“search something and you will most probably suggested by google to check the Wiki article”

Wikipedians are aware that the content which they collectively create is mirrored in traditional media due to its vast reach. Wikipedia has the capability of framing and legitimizing information which will then be reproduced by individuals who search for it. Article titles frame the scope of international conflicts before even pundits and academics are able to agree on ways to define it. The following comment by a Wikipedian shows how during their deliberations, they were not able to clearly agree on how to call their article because there was no clear consensus in public society:

“and one of the things that very much sticks out in my mind is that we had to decide what to call this article, and that was actually one of the biggest disputes, because there was no clear name in reliable sources on what we should call this, cause I know that the way that you title the article frames how people will understand the conflict, so if you are just inventing titles out of nowhere and framing it in that manner then what do you get? You get a skewed representation of what actually is happening. So there is a part of the article title policy in Wikipedia which says that you can make a neutral descriptive title

In this sense, this decision had to be taken by Wikipedia, and therefore, editorial decisions taken during deliberation processes on controversial subjects have the power to transcend Wikipedia's discussion environment, and significantly influence discourse. The same

Wikipedian elaborates on these editorial decisions and the process by which they influenced traditional mainstream media:

“But it’s very interesting to me how our editorial decisions on what to call a war has actually been mirrored in many other sources. So, this is what really concerns me about Wikipedia. ... So we did that for Wikipedia based reasons, we had to put it with this neutral descriptive title, but now, reliable sources had started to pick that up because presumably various people who read the article then presumed this is actually the name of the conflict and this is starting to be reproduced in books, it starts to be reproduced in news articles and you wonder what sort of actual impact is this Wikipedia dispute between 10 people having on how we actually refer to the content, and that is really concerning”

These processes have not been ignored by actors who seek to accumulate cultural capital in search of knowledge framing to either change or maintain current power relations, thereby turning the Wikipedia into another ideological battleground. Wikipedians are therefore worried that in time, attempts to control Wikipedia content by powerful actors will increase and intensify, as illustrated by the following comments from concerned contributors:

“I am under the impression that over the last decade, political campaigns, businesses etc. have wised up to the fact that WP is the first point of reference for very many people, and that consequently the amount of paid editing and similar practices has increased”

“It is much more difficult to detect "slow-editwar" and "civil-PoV-pushing" behavior by long-term editors. It tends to evolve over time as wikiprojects become concentrated down to a few like-minded individuals (the "fit in or fuck off" factor), but we've also had evidence of programmatic attempts by external

organizations (including some governments, like that of Pakistan) to "seed" Wikipedia with planted editors”

“the incentive for political, religious, and other organizations to try to plant people in WP and bend its content is just going to intensify and with much higher stakes that species name squabbling”

7.3. Wikipedians: Rules and Philosophy

In this theme, Wikipedians discuss about different purposes and uses of Wikipedia policies and regulations, as well as the ways in which according to them the Neutral Point of View should be achieved.

7.3.1. Wikipedian uses of policy

Policies, guidelines and essays are the building blocks of Wikipedia’s governing structure. They are employed in order to manage content creation and address issues which arise from this process. However, it seems that rules and regulations play only a small role in regulating behavior (Goldspin, 2010), so disruptive behaviors within the knowledge creation process are common, especially in controversial articles such as the ones featured in this dissertation. Wikipedians wield policies and guidelines in order to defend themselves from disruptive behavior at the same time as they shape content thanks to policy interpretation and application. One interviewed Wikipedian thus found that “sticking to policy solves all issues”. Additionally, some Wikipedians always resort to

policy independent on how heated debates can get. A Wikipedian expresses the way in which he participates in content disputes always involves the use of policy:

“Yes. And often. But I always called upon the sources and policy. And tried maintaining my composure. You shouldn't respond to an insult with an insult no matter how much you want to.

Additionally, the same editor labels policy-based editors as reasonable, as opposed to PoV pushers:

“And I have actually found that there are more of the reasonable policy-based editors than the unreasonable POV-pushing ones.”

Mainly, policy is used to direct collaborative knowledge building into a coherent narrative when disputes are rampant:

“my first instinct was to do was to take what I know about Wikipedia policy and the way in which we are supposed to use it to try and take mainstream western sources and try to bring them in there to try to... obviously this is not going to be neutral but to try to put some sort of coherent narrative into what was happening there”

However, Wikipedians also understand that experience with rules leads to more prevalence of content (Preece, Schneiderman, 2009), and thus use policy in order to battle disruptive edits, admittedly ignoring search of consensus in favor of persistence in illustrating bad

practice through the application of policy, while recognizing that this kind of solution goes against the spirit of encyclopedia:

“So when we have these sorts of disputes you simply say this is what the policy and guidelines are and this is how we follow them. And eventually, if you do that and you are persistent enough and make that clear, then those people who are contesting those things, either have to try to change the policy, which pretty much never works or they just either get banned, blocked or fall away of their own accord”

On the other hand, as policy interpretation plays a major role in conflict resolution (Forte, Bruckman, 2008), some Wikipedians might not necessarily agree with certain policy applications, even if they agree that policies need to be followed for the purpose of collaboration. This is expressed below:

“So yes, no original research. This is another thing. WP has this policy and although I understand where it comes from, I believe that sometimes it is needed to add information only for the sake of the knowledge. Not because I’m trying to add it for propaganda purposes but only for the fact that this information is out there and it’s open. It’s just that no reliable sources are covering it and they most likely never will be”

my most common problem is that I don't agree with the “most common name” policy, so I've often been on the losing end of such disputes - Considering that

official policy is being followed there, however, I don't really have much reason to complain in those cases, though”

7.3.2. The Search for Neutrality

Matei and Dobrescu (2011) arrived to the conclusion that the NPoV is strictly unenforceable, and therefore finding consensus through ambiguity seemed to be a way forward for the purpose of achieving consensus within collaboration practices. However, Wikipedians express different ways in which they attempt to establish a NPoV in article content, and as one Wikipedian entions, there are always two sides to the story, insinuating that achieving neutrality is a complex endeavor:

“I just noticed how much of a mess basically the article was, and the reason why it was a mess, was because.. very simply to say there are two sides of the equation... there are your Ukranian side and there was the Russian side and I

knew this was kind of a reductionist kind of way of looking at it, but this is what happens”

On the one hand, some Wikipedians believe that Points of View have no place in Wikipedia, which is expressed by this Wikipedian as follows:

“I think that Wikipedia's editors should leave their personal points of view at the door if they want to edit Wikipedia's article”

Additionally, a Wikipedian claims that letting opposing sides quarrel for content is unproductive:

“We would end up with these so called apparently two diametrically opposed sides which can never be reconciled and which produces no information for anybody”

Furthermore, another Wikipedian comments that it is not Wikipedia’s job to cater to all points of view:

“.the concept of “NPOV” only goes so far – if one side claims the sky is blue and the other claims it's red, it cannot be WP's job to put both claims side by side and leave it at that, but instead make it abundantly clear that all relevant experts agree that the sky is, in fact, blue”

On the other hand, a different Wikipedian brings a contrasting perspective. He observes that often, different sides are misrepresented and that the only way to balance said

representation is to provide sources from the opposing side, even if they are considered to be biased by the participants in the collaboration process:

“I try my best to remain neutral. It’s just that sometimes when there is a lack of balance in an article, say, when one side is definitely being more presented in a page, then I try to present the other side as a way to balance the article”

“I believe that people need to be presented from both perspectives on this side, on that side and this is what is still the ongoing struggle with modern articles on Wikipedia ... I think this is the main way to get true neutrality”

Furthermore, in some instances, information about a specific side in the conflict might be harder to obtain, but that it is important to share this information for the sake of neutrality:

“there is obviously plenty of information for the Ukrainian side because these are actual military units, ... But there is more murkier, darker waters in regards to

the separatist side and so if we want to keep WP balanced and neutral then we have to find information regarding their side too so”

Interestingly, a Wikipedian answered the questions regarding what he considered to be the best and worst qualities of Wikipedia in a surprising manner by illustrating a paradox created by the NPoV policy in Wikipedia:

Question: “What are the things that you dislike the most about Wikipedia?”

Answer: “The bias. Too many people with their personal points of view that they want to push onto the readers”

Question: “what are then, the things that you like the most about Wikipedia?”

Answer: “Multiple editors with different political and religious viewpoints. Everyone can get involved. And national viewpoints as well”.

7.4. Wikipedians and their Concerns

In this theme, interviewed Wikipedians consider the potential problems which Wikipedia has, talk about stress produced by the editing environment and editing practice, discuss administrator involvement in the conflict resolution process of contentious articles, warn

about advocacy groups and recount disruptive strategies which are used in order to prevent collaboration among contributors.

7.4.1. The Problems with Wikipedia

Wikipedia, as a free open-access repository of knowledge is noble and idealistic project at its core, and an example of altruistic collaboration practices put to use for the benefit of the public. However, when collaborative gathering of information enters a contentious context, such as our studied armed conflicts, many problems arise. Wikipedians who participate in the editing of information regarding current and on-going armed conflicts are fully aware of this issue.

“it is good at the core principle. It is the practice, the implementation that is really problematic”

While understanding the value and necessity of the creation of such real-time encyclopedia articles, Wikipedians voice their concerns over the potential influence that a small amount

of editors might have over general knowledge about an important socio-political issue such as an armed conflict.

“I don’t like one bit the way that individuals have so much influence on the control of information.”

They explain that after edit wars over content have settled down, it is still up to the editors themselves to decide what information remains (albeit temporary in many cases) within the article.

“I also hope people could understand that Wikipedia is another medium for information warfare. But, Wikipedia is really good in the sense that it has a large number of ways to stay on a proper encyclopedic course. But at the end of the day, it all comes down to the editors themselves and how they want to present the information to Wikipedia's readers.”

Furthermore, Wikipedians are worried that information written on the online encyclopedia inevitable permeates into society, while giving too much influence to anonymous Wikipedia editors over how world issues are to be understood. One of the most prominent contributors recounts the moment in which mainstream media started using the nouns which Wikipedia editors created in order to address the War in Donbass conflict, thus giving anonymous editors cultural power comparable to that of established mainstream media. A notion that is a concern for Wikipedia as a whole:

“But once it starts to be this font of truth, which is displayed prominently on google search results where people would not be able to tell the difference

between advocacy and a coherent summary of what reliable sources say, that's when it becomes a problem”

“But it's very interesting to me how our editorial decisions on what to call a war has actually been mirrored in many other sources. So, this is what really concerns me about Wikipedia. So we did that for Wikipedia based reasons, we had to put it with this neutral descriptive title, but now, reliable sources had started to pick that up because presumably various people who read the article then presumed this is actually the name of the conflict and this is starting to be reproduced in books, it starts to be reproduced in news articles and you wonder what sort of actual impact is this Wikipedia dispute between 10 people having on how we actually refer to the content, and that is really concerning. The whole dispute is concerning. And I don't regret the compromise that we made in order to get the article on some sort of stable ground, but at the same time I don't want Wikipedia editors determining how we refer to conflicts.”

This potential cultural power can become very dangerous because veteran Wikipedians themselves agree that the encyclopedia, despite its bureaucratic rules, policies and regulations can be easily manipulated, And that people will have the means and desire to

do it purposefully with the goal of winning the information battles which wars and armed conflicts are characterized for:

“Well, I mean, I really have to say and I really feel that Wikipedia is very, very easily manipulatable, by various parties, it is really, and it is not supposed to be, but it very much is a battleground for different advocates of various positions,”

“There’s like all sorts of strange mailing lists used for manipulating content in the eastern European kind of history field”

Wikipedia has a myriad of rules, regulations, tools and conflict resolution processes in place for the purpose of battling advocacy. However, Wikipedians are concerned that veteran contributors can easily get around them, or use these same tools in their favor in order to manipulate content if they choose to do so:

“Once you learn the road, and you understand how it works, it is very easy to do it. All of wikipedia’s defense against these things rely upon the will of individual editors to actually challenge it and more importantly to actually witness it. This is probably the most dangerous part as I said before, of the actual enterprise.”

This danger is enhanced especially because potential Wikipedian traits such as persistence and savvy use of rules and regulations, coupled with experience in Wikipedia conflict dynamics can exert more weight on an argument than truth, reliability, logic or the quality of neutrality. A Wikipedian illustrates this issue while expressing concern that it is not only who he considers to be point of view pushers that use these tactics. According to him, it is also contributors like himself, who consider themselves to be editors without a particular

partisan agenda and who are committed to the development of the free online encyclopedia for altruist reasons, that use these practices for the purpose of content retention:

“and, in many ways, it is basically a conflict in and of itself, different points of view which are clashing with each other and presenting different arguments and in the end whoever is the most steadfast is the one who wins. It’s not really a question of which one is the right one, it is whoever really puts the most effort into it and whoever sticks around after eons of attacks. What that means is that oftentimes Wikipedia can be used as a tool for advocacy, and there is a lot of advocacy.”

“I would say that by and large, in the case of the Ukrainian articles, most of the disputes that were “resolved”, were resolved in a way that was acceptable to me, but usually the way in which they were resolved was simply a matter of persistence. If you are persistent in saying, well this is what Wikipedia policy says, this is what we should do, and you keep following the article, then eventually the people that are making all of uproar kind of fall away on the cord. It’s not a kind of resolution, it is simply kind of gradual process of silencing of people”

Thus, it is natural that given the circumstances, Wikipedians become concerned with people inserting their own points of view or propaganda over the collective search for consensus. Indeed, one Wikipedian’s opinion on what information should be placed on an article might clash with another. In contexts such as war, it can often be difficult to find consensus because opposed Wikipedian difference of opinion and uses of sources might have difficulty finding common ground, thus hindering the search for consensus in the editing process. A Wikipedian describes these issues mentioning that there does not necessarily have to be a hidden agenda behind people’s motivations for contributing to

Wikipedia. It is rather, the nature of the information itself which invariably creates conflict among different contributors:

“some of us have good reasoning for it, others have I guess more manipulative reasons, some people try to get their propaganda out there but there’s also people who try to get true information out there and that’s where the line starts to blur because some people’s truth becomes another person’s propaganda”

However, this does not exclude the fact that propaganda might not find its way into the Wikipedia editing process, and Wikipedians have to be constantly vigilant. This is the main motivation of one of the prominent interviewed contributors:

What motivates me its all the BIAs fake news and disinformation being spread in sensible topics and how young people read then and believe it.

Logically, there is a permanent suspicion that contributors whose goal is to push certain points of view in quest for cultural power through Wikipedia organize themselves for this purpose. According to Wikipedians involved in the editing process on war articles, there are teams of editors and special interest groups who work for the purpose of framing specific points of view and ideologies:

“Yeah, it’s quite fascinating how WP in a modern sense has almost become like a battleground of information, it’s almost like there is a true information war being waged by many sides, some sides might even have special interest groups that might back it up too”.

“Biased opinions are also a problem. You have teams of editors pushing their own concepts about some areas (History of Ireland is one of them). There should be mechanisms or some kind of caveat to avoid that our children get that

information as true, without any criticism (it is very common in Spanish Wikipedia).”

And especially those articles have been targeted by a lot of Turkish and Gulf States editors. You can see in my WP Userpage a list of Pro Turkish Sockpuppets. The same person pushing a bias and POV on erticles. thats why my edits ar centered on those articles. To keep neutral controvertial articles is my duty and from others.

7.4.2. Wikipedian Stress

Contributing to Wikipedia is voluntary work, which takes a lot of time and effort for virtually no other benefit than the satisfaction of contributing to a free repository of knowledge. It takes an enormous amount of hard work and dedication to research, look for reliable sources, add and edit information while engaging in discussions in order to develop an article whose content everybody can agree upon and be proud of the result. When asked about how much time is spent on Wikipedia within a week, a particularly involved contributor puts it this way:

“yes, 13 years ago and counting... I usually make my edits in the after office, I am more busy right now than in the past, so I currently spend barely two or three hours a day on WP”

What another person could consider this to be an extensive effort, for this type of contributor, two to three hours a day of free time spent on Wikipedia seems to barely be

enough to get the job done. This shows the kind of commitment of free time necessary for a strong implication with the Wikipedia project.

All interviewed Wikipedians were veteran contributors who have shown strong involvement over the years. This kind of commitment however, has not been without drawbacks in the form of stress, and many have mentioned this during the interviews.

“you know... stress is involved in the process, which I think you will find out eventually”

As Wikipedia editor retention is on the decline (Halfaker et al, 2013; Schneider et al, 2014), Konieczny (2018) notes that “fewer contributors to a project that relies on volunteers for nearly all activities is certainly a major concern for questions of sustainability and growth of Wikipedia”. A Wikipedian mentions however that what Wikipedia needs is not just sheer numbers of editors, but rather those that truly embrace the collaborative aspect of the encyclopedia:

“Obviously there are issues with editor retention but I don’t think that the people that are causing trouble in this manner are the people that you want to retain”

Konieczny (2018) continues by pointing out that many reasons why volunteers end up quitting in traditional organizations are not present in Wikipedia. Factors such as being badly managed and feeling undervalued (Locke et al. 2003), overworked (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998) or feeling disillusioned with the project (Yanay and Yanay, 2008) were not seen to be highly relevant. In line with Konieczny’s research, no Wikipedians seemed to argue that Wikipedia’s content was not improving overall. However, as individual Wikipedians contribute to more and more articles, they have that much more content to

protect against potentially disruptive changes. This adds to building up the stress that Wikipedians have to go through during their editing participation.

“it's like it is their part time job almost. Sometimes they do it because they feel like they need to keep the order on the page because if they are gone for a while and maybe a lot of junk might be added to the article. so basically those people I could understand fully, it might be very tiring for them, they don't wanna carry on and it is very difficult”

“We change the wording of one specific sentence over and over and over again until we reach a version that is acceptable to both parties[...]And this is a really tiring process.”

“Yes. Every few months we get an editor who disrupts a balanced status quo that was previously established and then we have to go through the same process again until a compromise is found to satisfy the new editor or, if he doesn't want to compromise and his edits are contrary to Wikipedia's policies then we get 3rd party editors involved or even administrators until a solution is found. That's it. [...] The reason why I decided to semi-retire from Wikipedia”

Furthermore, Konieczny (2018) mentions that “Wikipedia has not made significant reforms aimed at reducing conflict among editors”, and that “this situation is contributing to the feelings of abandonment, stress and a battleground atmosphere”. On the question about the general atmosphere within article discussion, a Wikipedian answered: “I have to say, it really was taxing. It was taxing on my psyche to even participate”

Additionally, it is important to note that the subjects of this study are specialized in participating in particularly controversial articles, and have to inevitably deal with conflict over content on a daily basis. Thus, the stress of monitoring content and dealing with

disruptive behavior accumulates over time. One important issue in this regard brought up in the interviews is the necessity to deal with and accommodate fringe viewpoints, even if some editors might consider that such information has no place within an encyclopedia article and consider it to be tiresome and time wasting.

“And in my personal view, way too much time is spent on Wikipedia basically trying to accommodate people who are unreasonable and who are trying to push a point of view”

“but there was a lot of time spent on Wikipedia where basically you had to create a false balance where basically both sides were right and you just had to kind of mediate it and kind of create this flat level where a dispute was resolved in theory but it was only resolved by compromises in the content of the encyclopedia to accommodate a fringe viewpoint”

Finally, the efforts of Wikipedians are hardly recognized outside of the Wikipedian community. For some Wikipedians, the amount of work put into the development and maintenance of articles amounts to a part time job which is deprived of any material benefits and receives “less cultural capital in the form of respect than most volunteers to traditional, non-profit, voluntary organizations” (Konieczny, 2018).

“The people that edit WP are fading away. I have never seen all those editors retiring in a short period of time [...] Another fact is that edits are not payed. You

don't get a single \$ for expending hours reading and editing long articles. So after a period of time people leave. Specially seasoned editors.”

7.4.3. Administrator involvement

Previous research has found that Wikipedia admins are motivated by altruism in undertaking their roles (Baytiyeh, Pfaffman, 2010), and additionally, that their administrative role does not give them significant advantages over content (Konieczny, 2009). However, in contentious socio-political articles about ongoing wars, their presence is constantly required in order to help solve emerging issues during the content-creation process. Interviewed Wikipedians show different experiences in regards to admin involvement. Admin participation is considered to be fundamental in the conflict resolution process:

“Third parts are fundamental to solve these cases. as well as compromise from the administrators”

However, there are contrasting experiences with said participation. One Wikipedian recounts that admins have been helpful in other areas of interest unrelated to current, ongoing wars:

“I have a couple of problems in other areas of interest years before the Dobass war and I very grateful with admins (in those cases) for supporting my position”

In the experience of interviewed Wikipedians who have participated in contentious articles about ongoing wars, more is expected from administrators. According to one Wikipedian,

admins seemed reluctant to participate and make decisions in key conflict resolution processes:

“and so you had to spend each day kind of dealing with these people, and administrators would do nothing”

“Administrators were very reluctant to participate cause they didn’t really know about the subject and they didn’t want to get involved in this kind of very contentions dispute”

“there was a very very strong reluctance on the part of administrators to get involved at all.”

“they didn’t want to be seen as making a decision with regards to who is right. They didn’t want to ban Russian editors, they didn’t want to ban Ukrainian editors, they don’t want to ban anybody in the middle, they were afraid I guess to participate. And so, the usual behavioral methods of resolution were not often used and as for conflict resolution itself, there were occasion times where we

invited people from outside the topic area to comment on what we should do in a given situation”

According to the same Wikipedian, contentious content had to be patrolled by the editors themselves:

“the only thing that stops them is basically the editors themselves being vigilant, because again, the administrators are not actively engaging themselves in the topic area and you actually have to patrol yourself”

Furthermore, when asked whether admin authority is respected, another Wikipedian ironically mentions that “as in any human organisation, admins use their privileges against the wrong people sometimes.” and “I guess I am not the only editor with complaints to make.”

7.4.4. Advocacy Groups

The very nature of Wikipedia anonymity may produce a lack of transparency that can be employed for political agendas (Santana, Wood, 2009). It is no surprise therefore that the infiltration of advocacy groups within the encyclopedia’s editing process is one of the main fears of Wikipedians with experience in contentious socio-political topics. One Wikipedian begins by admitting that “one person’s truth becomes another person’s propaganda”, illustrating the fact that dealing with advocacy and managing to unveil it is a complex endeavor:

“some of us have good reasoning for it, others have I guess more manipulative reasons, some people try to get their propaganda out there but there’s also people

who try to get true information out there and that's where the line starts to blur because some people's truth becomes another person's propaganda"

However, most interviewed Wikipedians are very adamant in alerting of the dangers of advocacy. One Wikipedian explains illustrates the reasons for this phenomenon:

"A lot of people contribute here to glorify their country, make other people aware of social and historical injustices, to support their personal beliefs, earn a few bucks or to promote products, rather than to contribute to encyclopedia"

"bad actors" who are not here (alluding to their lack of intention in contributing to Wikipedia) and are trying to misuse the site for various purposes including advertisement and even placing the "kernels of disinformation" on numerous pages"

Another interviewed Wikipedian directly accuses other nations of criticism elimination practices (Oboler, Steinberg, Stein, 2010). It is then illustrated through an example how advocacy groups fortify themselves within niches of the Wikipedia for the purpose of influencing content:

"fiefdoms" of long-term editors trying to make up their own rules and to effectively "own" entire categories of the encyclopedia, most often to enforce some kind of rather doctrinaire position on something, and to force a superficial

kind of consistency across articles even when the underlying facts don't warrant this and when doing so tends to distort or cloud the material for the reader.”

Additionally, he recounts an example of an eight-year long advocacy campaign outside of the scope of sociopolitical influence:

“an eight-year campaign by [*****] to force Wikipedia to engage in the capitalization of the common names of species (and in particular to name birds following a pattern, an "official" name list, that most ornithology organizations don't actually use”

Finally, the same contributor alerts of the real dangers and possibilities of Wikipedia advocacy which attempt to vie for cultural capital through control of its content:

“The cleverest among these can very gently steer content toward a bias, gather likeminded editors around them as a defense wall, and if they're really good at manipulation and negotiation, even become Wikipedia admins over time and cement their positions not just to affect content but to protect others who do so (and ban/block those who do so from the opposite direction or who even just insist on neutrality).”

7.4.5. Disruptive Strategies

During the interviews, unsurprisingly every interviewed Wikipedian produced stories and examples regarding disruptive behaviors that other Wikipedians use in order to attack

fellow contributors in an attempt to prevent collaboration practices. The purpose of these disruptive strategies as one Wikipedian puts it is to disrupt collaboration:

“The only people that are actually benefitting from this are the people that are causing discord because they accomplish their goal, which is to make life hard for people that actually write a coherent article for people to read”

Disruptive practices are generally the work of what many Wikipedians refer to as PoV Warriors, as explained by an interviewee:

“PoV warriors (for point of view) are people emotionally involved in the subject of an article, so they will try to impose their position by crashing through all Wikipedia policies. Emotionally or paid by other people with economic interest (spam)”

A different Wikipedian elaborates on his perception on what he considers to be PoV Warriors:

“Dogmatism and selfrighteousness, complete incapability for civil discourse, outright ignorance of sources and facts that don't fit their point of view, lack of awareness for other viewpoints or for the problems that lack of diversity causes”

A third interviewee provides advice for Wikipedians regarding unpleasant encounters with such individuals. He mentions the existence of wiktigers, a colloquial name for editors with strong views; wikipgangs, groups of editors that edit together and defend each other's

arguments and wikispies, editors dedicated to reveal personal information about other Wikipedians:

“Avoid contentious community discussions and editing any subjects that are controlled by outside political organizations or individual activists. Otherwise, you will be eaten by wikitigers, beaten by wikigangs, identified by wikispies, defamed on external websites, and possibly restricted and banned.”

Another Wikipedian illustrates the use of previous consensus as a bad practice within articles which should not be used:

“A preference/viewpoint of editors who have most worked at a page cannot be used as a bludgeon to prevent or undo other editors' work, even if it conflicts with what the "locals" like. That is, wikiprojects and similar little knots of editors cannot make up their own rules, much less push them on everyone else”

A different Wikipedian illustrates the practice of sockpuppeting, which is the use of several accounts by the same person for the purpose of illegitimately influencing content:

“There was basically a group of maybe 5, 10 accounts, which was basically what is called sock-puppets of one person that were basically trying to stuff discussions in the Ukrainian topic and they would play of both sides and try to create all sorts of absurdities. [...] And so, because the accounts had different account names

and they had different points of view, and if you went to the userpage, it seemed like they were legitimate accounts”

Furthermore, impersonation is illustrated:

“then that person then made multiple accounts, one impersonating me and one impersonating [another user]”

Additionally, a practice of shadow editing Wikipedia policies and guidelines is observed:

“Something I’ve noticed recently and in the past is that basically one editor can insert a change into one of our guidelines or policies, they can go in and tweak

the wording a little bit and make a point, and they can basically hide it under an edit somewhere”

Finally, organized efforts at Wikipedian slander are revealed:

“And you get attacked in every form, even get attacked off Wikipedia, there are basically hate page which say... you are doing... this person is forging some sort of false narrative which is going to be propaganda, we need to take him down”.

In conclusion, Wikipedia articles regarding contentious topics has turned into a battleground for fellow Wikipedians who attempt to participate in the collaborative knowledge creation process.

7.5. Wikipedians and Geopolitics

In this theme, Wikipedians discuss the difficulties encountered in dealing with political subjects, the challenges in discerning facts in the middle of propaganda wars, and the commitment of Wikipedians to provide information about forgotten conflicts.

7.5.1. Political Slanting

Within wars and international conflicts, politics and media warfare play a central role. Wikipedians, in search for consensus have to deal with competing narratives about the justifications and events which happened during the development of armed conflicts.

Throughout their involvement in the editing process, they notice therefore that most disputes which arise in this context are of ideological nature:

“you'll see that a large percentage of them are of the "your ethnicity/country/religion versus mine" variety”.

“I feel like pretty much all conflicts on Wikipedia really kind of are rooted in two things. They are either rooted in basically nationalism and nationalist claims, that's probably one of the most fertile grounds for dispute in Wikipedia, and it can extend to any topic area” [...] And then the other type of dispute is mainly an ideological one. And so... and I mean ideological in kind of a broad way, basically in the way that people think about their beliefs and their principles and how these conflict. And these can also extend into any possible area.”

Wikipedians realize that the encyclopedia carries a lot of potential influence over what individuals in search for information on the site think about any given armed conflict described within. Thus, they note that there has been a strong increase in article slanting attempts, and the notion that political actors have noticed Wikipedia's potential for the accumulation of cultural capital:

“I can't quite recall substantial discussions on talk pages about any such matters, but that might simply be because my most active period on WP precedes the ballooning of the user base and the strong increase in attempts to slant articles towards one side or the other”

“I am under the impression that over the last decade, political campaigns, businesses etc. have wised up to the fact that WP is the first point of reference

for very many people, and that consequently the amount of paid editing and similar practices has increased”

And unfortunately, this is observed by Wikipedians who mention biases within the articles in which they participate:

“I’ve noticed a huge bias against anything that is posted by a Russian source or a pro-separatist source for that matter. So since internationally Russia and the reputation is being heavily damaged right now, anybody who posts anything against Russia is considered as a possibility”

“I believe that even if someone does not like a certain group, for example, there is a lot of Syrian jihadist groups out there that commit war crimes. Those groups although they might have ideologies that most editors will not agree with, I think that their symbolism that is used by the group should remain on WP not because by any means we are trying to promote their groups but only because we are trying to preserve the image that they have to identify their group, an so...”

Finally, as we can see in the next section, current armed conflicts are some of the hardest places in Wikipedia where truth can be discerned rationally, as point of view pushers committed to insert their political views in articles about war, disregarding Wikipedia’s

goals of neutrality are generally understood to be a voluntary force, driven by their own ideas:

“because conflicts are one of the prime topics where it's hardest to make sure the (best obtainable version of the) truth is reflected in the articles”

“most zealots are not employees but devotees, directed by doctrine not by individual handlers”

7.5.2. Virtual Fog of War

Wikipedians' role as editors in current, ongoing, wars places them at the forefront of information interpretations. Those who participate in the editing process are in charge of framing the direction an article will take, while attempting to maintain a Neutral Point of View. This task is a great burden over those Wikipedians committed to the ideals of the encyclopedia, and aware of the danger this responsibility conveys. They experience their involvement in the process as participants that have to discern truthful and factual information in the middle of disinformation and slander campaigns coming from most information sources. This makes their editing task very difficult. Wikipedians illustrate

below how the amount of unverifiable information surrounds them in a virtual fog of war. First, there is the problem of too many sources and contributors providing advocacy:

“the sheer amount of advocacy that was making it impossible to do anything, people making basically crazy opinions on either side about what was going on or what was not going on”

Second, the editing process becomes muddled with discussions without a clear purpose:

“and I can say this as a main participant, [my goal] was basically to try to end the discussion ... but the actual definition of where it was taking place or what sort of war it was, was not very clear”

Third, Wikipedians feel buried under the significant amounts of disinformation:

“So there was this whole dispute of what is the point of even putting it there, it says supported by Russia and then says claimed by Ukraine and the whole thing is meaningless because what does that even mean. Is it supported by Russia or is it not supported by Russia? It becomes this kind of classic disinformation nonsense which nobody can understand”

To the point in which it becomes impossible to discern truth from falsehood:

“and this becomes an issue because then if one side is reporting that this is the truth and the other side is saying this is the truth, then on English WP there is

always going to be a conflict between what's the true knowledge then. They are telling me this and the other people are telling me that, so who do I believe?"

Information is furthermore slanted towards Western sources:

“But of course unfortunately even to this day in western sources there isn't much information on the separatists side, there is obviously plenty of information for the Ukrainian side because these are actual military units, ... But there is more murkier, darker waters in regards to the separatist side [...] and again since this is on the separatist's side, there is a lot of information that is not really known much in the west because the media is mostly being shown to Russia.”

Finally, disinformation is coupled with suspicious claims inserted within article content and talk page discussion

“Well, to give one example: Occasionally, I've seen attempts (mostly by anonymous IPs, AFAIR) to insert the “little green men” claims as a smokescreen against the evidence of Russian troops operating in Eastern Ukraine; those were always quickly reverted by me or other editors”

In conclusion, within articles about on-going wars, Wikipedians have great difficulty in discerning truth due to the very nature of armed conflicts and its underlying media wars which spill over to the virtual battleground of Wikipedia.

7.5.3. Fringe Conflicts

As Graham (2015) shows, Wikipedia is characterized by uneven geographies in the editing patterns of its content. Two of the researched articles (War in Darfur, Yemeni Civil War)

involved wars which were not considered to be mainstream in Western society. Therefore, when asked about the reasons over which interviewed Wikipedians decided to participate by contributing in these articles, the concept of Fringe conflicts was unearthed. Wikipedians who have committed their time and energy to the editing process are

motivated by their desire to shed light on forgotten wars from the point of view of Western media:

“I am interested in the Yemen conflict because its a forgotten war”

Wikipedians cite lack of interest in these conflicts due to economic motives:

“But the reason why not many people do not pay attention to it is because, in my opinion, there are no real economic motives. Unlike most of the other conflicts in the Middle East.”

This lack of interest is inherent both in the public who searches for information in the online encyclopedia and for the Wikipedian who spends his time contributing to knowledge creation:

Question: “by people are you referring to the public or to Wikipedia editors?”

Answer: “Public, but, since you mention Wikipedia's editors, they also don't seem too much interested in the conflict, unlike most of the other ones.”

Conflicts are therefore abandoned by media, public opinion and Wikipedians alike due to lack of resources which produces little geo-political impact:

“Sudan and Yemen have no real ressources that could be of interest, and so they are left on their own.”

A contributor asserts that without his contributions and particular interest, articles on fringe conflicts would be neglected:

Question: “What do you think would happen to these articles without your contributions?”

Answer: “They would neglected. They would be neglected. Just like the war itself is.”

International interest is therefore mirrored in Wikipedian interest, when the Syrian conflict and the American Civil War are compared to other more peripheral events:

“there is no real push by the global community to end those conflicts. Unlike Syria and Iraq where, let's not kid ourselves, its all about the oil and the global positioning of the greater powers. Who controls Syria and Iraq he's in a position to influence the whole Middle East. In my opinion”

“American civil wars are extensively covered by reliable sources you will not have troubles finding various POVs on what happened but, do you think something is true for incidents happened in other parts of the world? I don't think so”

Fortunately, there are many Wikipedians who are willing to contribute to fringe conflicts in order to promote access to knowledge through the development of the online-encyclopedia:

“I've always had a strong interest in conflicts and tried to contribute to articles which I perceived to get insufficient attention and care, so those might have been the reasons”

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the representation of editing conflict within controversial Wikipedia article about war. It has done so by illustrating key objects under discussion during the editing process and has unraveled a framework of Wikipedian discursive practices used in order to legitimize content. Moreover, influential trend-setting discussions within the knowledge creation process were highlighted through an analysis of rational discourse with which communication distortions among participating Wikipedians have been identified. Furthermore, Wikipedian experience during this highly contentious collaboration process has been discussed in order to better understand their perceptions regarding the role of Wikipedia in society, their own participation in the process and their concern regarding the encyclopedia's potential influence.

For this purpose, this dissertation has looked into how Wikipedia is constructed and how the content creation process is developed. Wikipedia was found to be a free, online, open access encyclopedia built through wiki technology which allows every user to be a potential editor, thereby promoting collaboration practices within knowledge co-creation. This lack of gate-keeping can be problematic to the reputation and reliability of the Wikipedia and it was one of the main reasons of the exit of Larry Sanger, one of its co-founders, from the project. Lack of gate-keeping potentially allows the encyclopedia to be infiltrated, not by individual users eager to collaborate in knowledge building, but by individuals and agencies with an agenda to legitimize specific social realities. Thus, on the one hand, lack of gate-keeping allows the Wikipedia to grow, and allows every individual the freedom to have direct input on its content; its collaborative practices promote individual contributors to thoroughly follow and include every bit of information available on diverse topics, and work together in order to expand and improve articles on a daily basis. On the other hand, lack of gate-keeping allows Wikipedia to potentially become an

invaluable tool for propaganda purposes. The difference between both positions is not clear to regular Wikipedia readers, and for research scientists, it can be challenging to discern.

Wikipedia members are highly motivated volunteers who for the most part contribute to the encyclopedia motivated by altruistic reasons. Herein lies a problem with reliability, as it is difficult to imagine any Wikipedian who would claim otherwise. In text discussions within article talk pages and in interviews, all Wikipedians assure that they have no agenda and that their purpose is to improve society and for the most part this is probably true. However, every individual comes with his or her own inherent biases and different world views. Wikipedians themselves agree that they are not immune to bias and even if they do their best to avoid them, they are not always successful. The issue remains that Wikipedians will compete for content which they consider reliable and true. However, different perspectives, different priorities and different definitions of concepts create opposing views during the editing process which have to be constantly negotiated.

Wikipedia is governed by a decentralized authority comprised of policies, guidelines and essays which rather than dictate practice from above, are prescribed by it. These rules and regulations are commonly cited for the purpose of solving content disputes. This decentralized governance and a policy of consensus seeking amongst anonymous contributors is what allows ample room for opposing views to permeate socio-political Wikipedia articles. This type of organization allows freedom of speech, grassroots knowledge and challenge of established opinions. Additionally, in the context of current wars, it has the possibility to provide alternative points of view away from global north knowledge models, and give a voice to different cultures and their perspectives. In practice however, Wikipedia talk pages about war become a virtual extension of the physical

conflict, where the information war surrounding the conflict is transferred from traditional media from opposing ideologies to individuals who subscribe to these particular views.

Wikipedia is furthermore considered a community of shared spaces, shared practice, shared resources, support and identity, engaged in interpersonal relationships with a common goal of building a free, online encyclopedia. As groups of like-minded individuals form through collaboration work, Wikipedians organize within interest groups who curate articles of the topic of their interest. This can result in a problem within editing practices, as such groups tend to impose certain standards, styles, and in some cases ideology to articles. They support each other's edits and content disputes and are sometimes able to take full control of specific topics by using open interpretations to Wikipedia rules and regulations in their favor. These groups have the potential to be artificially formed with clear purposes and goals in mind, such as monitoring information regarding a topic of their interest which could be of national or ideological value for nations, institutions or social and political movements.

Furthermore, content creation in Wikipedia is characterized by a content change-retain tension that is solved by generative response which results in the generation of new information. Conflicts resulting from this content change-retain tension are generally resolved through policy interpretation involving power plays, and consensus-seeking practice characterized by ambiguous interpretations of Wikipedia's central policy: The Neutral Point of View. This concept, which defines characterizes collaboration practices in Wikipedia is what allows the site to grow despite constant edit-wars and unrest among its contributors. Wikipedia's understanding of neutrality is what allows consensus to be reached in sometimes seemingly unsolvable disputes. However, this characteristic ambiguity with which information is treated can be problematic in the quest for truthful, reliable information. Wikipedias themselves often disagree over definitions of neutrality. Should neutrality allow for multiple points of view? Or should neutrality allow only neutral content? Wikipedians are reduced to negotiate this definition case by case, dispute by

dispute, and a lot of energy is spent trying to accommodate fringe points of view, in order to allow the development of the article to move forwards. Consequently, a neutral article does not necessarily imply that it will paint an accurate representation of reality. It will only display a temporary consensus agreed upon by several contributors which were involved in the discussion at a specific point in time. Articles therefore become dynamic and change with new interpretations of reality constantly provided by new influxes of editors. Moreover, because neutrality allows for ambiguous interpretations of reality, it can also be used as a tool for partisan points of view which hide behind the veil of neutral thought.

Therefore, power in Wikipedia is represented by control over content. Wikipedia, in its role as an open, collaborative encyclopedia has the potential to be used as a tool for the accumulation of cultural capital and framing of knowledge with the purpose of influencing discourse and ideology, creating a drive for accumulation of cultural capital in the form of power over meanings and definitions. This is precisely the reason why article creation of socio-political topics is of high interest. The process of content negotiation can shed light on current media trends, political thought and ideologies, together with the discursive devices they use in order to get their message across and influence society. It becomes important for social researchers to study Wikipedia and understand the mechanisms by which anonymous users attempt to vie for prevalence of their content in the encyclopedia's articles, as this information permeates and shapes our understandings of society in general, and of armed conflicts in particular by influencing our opinions in its regards and promote specific political action. Consequently, a discourse historical analysis of the textual corpus extracted from the talk pages of three distinct articles about current, on-going wars has shed light on knowledge framing topics of discussion within with the help of discursive strategies, Wikipedians engage in discursive work in attempts to legitimize their own content over that of their dialectic and ideological rivals. Participants nominate each other as in/out groups of Wikipedians on the bases of adherence to particular NPoV interpretations, refer to each other as Point of View pushers on the grounds of adherence to Wikipedia rules and label contributors as pro/anti national partisans. Through

predication discursive strategies, Wikipedians label each other as biased or unbiased; national supporters or detractors as PoV pushers; news media as reliable or unreliable; nation states as support or opposition to belligerents; and declare specific terminology to be neutral or non-neutral. Furthermore, Wikipedians engage in a manner of argumentation topoi which are stereotypical argument that imply common sense and that are used in order to influence change of opinion regarding content. The framework built for this analysis (provided in section 5.1) can be very useful in analyzing the discursive process of particular world view legitimation through Wikipedia articles in different contexts. The methodology applied in this dissertation can be very useful in order to thoroughly observe the legitimation or delegitimation process of information. Wikipedia has the power to normalize definitions and meaning which test and question the value and authority of diverse institutions, organizations and political movements, and therefore, content found about them in the online encyclopedia is of great importance to their social status. Thus, this dissertation can provide a starting point to understand the particularities of the de(legitimation) of political thought through the eyes of anonymous individuals in current crisis, and evaluate the discursive events which lead to the formation of encyclopedic articles as they happen in real time. Current crisis such as the COVID pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement or the Climate movement are certainly subject to the consensus seeking process which can be analyzed and quantified from its corresponding Wikipedia articles. Attempts to (de)legitimize their significance and authority can be clearly seen within the discussion pages. With the methodology developed for this study, it can be possible to make sense of the underlying discourse behind Wikipedia contributor participation and connect them to specific ideological views with the goal to identify attempts of (de)legitimation of Wikipedia content pertaining to articles of socio-political significance such as the ones mentioned above. Through a Wikipedia adapted discourse-historical approach, the study of semiotic data found within the site's discussion pages can make sense of the information (de)legitimation process through a discourse critique which has the ability to highlight contradictions in internal discursive structures, illustrate

manipulative practices and improve understanding of the knowledge building process in the midst of information warfare for information consumers and researchers alike.

Finally, through the use of semi-structured interviews, Wikipedian experiences were illustrated through their own narrative and story-telling which focused on their motivations for collaboration and participation, their relationship with mainstream media and access to information, their uses of policy and interpretation of neutrality, their concerns and their opinions on geopolitical influence of the encyclopedia. They have shown that they respect each other's voluntary involvement in collaboration practices, but warned that finding suitable collaboration partners that are understood to be Wikipedians who remain cordial even in disagreement, is a difficult and sometimes exhausting task. Throughout my own search of suitable candidates to interview, it was apparent that more and more valuable members of the community are retiring or semi-retiring. Almost all interviewed Wikipedians have mentioned that daily participation in highly contentious political environments such as Wikipedia current war articles is extremely stressing, with its rewards not compensating the effort of research and editing which many contributors provide. Wikipedia's open policy and ambiguous rules allow for the constant development of articles, but on the other hand, after almost two decades of hard work, struggle to maintain and attract high quality editors. This could be an eventual problem for the encyclopedia as in the future, altruist contributors could be slowly replaced by paid editors that follow specific editorial lines which lack transparency due to their anonymity.

In any case, Wikipedians value free access of information and the site's role as a pedagogical tool and as an agent dedicated to spreading knowledge. However, they also warn about the danger of Wikipedia misuse by PoV pushers. Wikipedians reflect on the site's principle of being based on reliable sources and at the same time warn about possible limitations of strictly following reliability. Conversely, they ponder on Wikipedia's influence on media and society as Wikipedia is the main information resource, a quality which awards the site with power. They reflect on instance where Wikipedia has

influenced traditional media and warn us that political actors are becoming savvy to Wikipedia's potential influencing capabilities. Moreover, Wikipedians recount how and why they use policy in order to influence the content change-retain tension and unravel some of the not-so-much consensus seeking practices in which they take part. They discuss the concept of neutrality and how it is on particular occasions limited for the purpose of solving content disputes and promote consensus particularly for the context of war. Then, interviewed Wikipedians illustrate the problems they attribute to the encyclopedia agreeing that "it is good at the core principles, but problematic in its interpretation", as they warn about the amount of influence small groups of Wikipedians can wield. For this reason, Wikipedians share their experience with high amounts of stress resulting from the collaboration process, and recount multiple disruptive techniques used by Wikipedians in order to prevent collaboration. They complain about lack of administrator involvement and warn about the practice and potential influences of advocacy groups. Finally, Wikipedians discuss within the context of war ideological influence in content dispute which often result in the political slanting of articles. They express their frustrations at their participation in information battlegrounds between competing propaganda and support Wikipedian involvement in fringe conflicts which would otherwise be forgotten.

Thus, involved Wikipedians are very aware of the dangers of the site as a repository of knowledge and as a tool to standardize information based on the opinions of small groups of editors. It is only a matter of time when editing Wikipedia for the purpose of promoting specific world views becomes the norm and de facto replaces the encyclopedia's original goal of providing easy access factual knowledge to the world. In essence, Wikipedia started as a representation of a global consensus of social cognition regarding information about all sorts of subjects. In time, it is transforming into a tool used in order to shape that very same consensus on social cognition in attempts to elicit specific political action. Wikipedia's description, the discursive work produced in its underbelly and experiences of its participants within contentious socio-political articles paints a darker picture of Wikipedia than the one illustrated by the encyclopedia's goals. A promise of a free, open source, online encyclopedia has the potential to become the threat of a controlled beacon

of online advocacy. Understanding the discursive processes present in Wikipedia content creation, as well as its potential for changing society and its potential for producing and reproducing hegemonic discourse can help researchers, Wikipedians and citizens alike to reach the promise of free, unbiased information.

9. References

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