

(Trans)formations in Wikipedia: A Critical Review of “2014 Anti-Muslim Riots in Sri Lanka”

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Wurth, Espi & van de Ven (2013) commenting on the material structure of the book *Only Revolutions* by Mark Danielewski (2006), suggest that the text should be approached as a “road novel” that “must be steered, manually navigated” and “thus performed” which “makes the reader an integral element of the functioning of the text” (p. 978). The approach to the study is informed by this engagement of the user or editor with the site and its content, a “mutually constitutive process” (Lister et al., 2009 p. 24) that is enabled by the structure or form of Wikipedia. The core concept of the study, “(trans)formations”, centralises the “radically open architecture” (Goode, 2010, p. 533), structure or form of Wikipedia which is “the world’s largest most used repository of user-generated content” (Graham, Straumann & Hogan, 2015, p.1). In order to assess this phenomenon, the research critically reviews the processes of writing and editing material in Wikipedia through a study of the article “2014 anti-Muslim riots in Sri Lanka”. The research thus engages with a politically contentious issue that has garnered national and global interest over the past few years, especially with the escalation of anti-Muslim sentiments following the recent incidents related to the Easter Attacks in 2019. As such, the selected Wikipedia article is set against dominant narratives of post-war Sri Lanka in which “there emerged several Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups who saw the favoured “other” no longer primarily as Tamil, but as Muslim as well” (Hannifa, Amarasuriya, Wijenayake, & Gunatilleke, 2014, p. 1). This study then utilises an intersection of postcolonial, national and digital theoretical frameworks to assess areas related to selective censorship and self-censorship, modifying of “editor behaviour” (Goldpsink, 2010, p. 652) through self-regulatory and self-reflexive practices, silences and gaps in the representation of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, shaping national memory on the digital sphere and the potential for cyber-activism through the democratisation and decentralisation of power. Accordingly, the study focuses on how the structure of the Wikipedia site and the engagement of users with this digital space not only makes provision for changes in the text, but extends to transforming traditional definitions of concepts from non-violent activism to communal engagement.

Keywords: (Trans)formations; Wikipedia; 2014 Anti-Muslim Riots; Structure/ Form; User

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