Online Documents of India's Past
Digital Archives and Memory Production

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■ **ABSTRACT:** How can the online distribution of heritage facilitate successful forms of collective online memory production? Two online archives from India are taken as case studies to analyze practices that make online archives effective as devices for recalling and constructing the Indian past. It is not only contextual conditions of the Internet age, but also particular applied practices of presenting, communicating, and using social media that enable it. Yet, the analysis of the two recently created online archives, which are partially driven by the idea of widening access, show that they do not so much set up counterpositions to established conceptions of archives as regulating entities, but rather aim at becoming acknowledged heritage agents.

■ **KEYWORDS:** archives, digital archives, heritage, India, Internet, memory, museum archives, online archives

The film starts with an old, grayish-brown, stained background. White, tender flower graphics start to grow into it as a gentle piano music begins to play. "Indian Memory Project" is now written in black capital letters. "The World's first Visual & Narrative based Archive"—the background now changes to a yellowed map of the Indian subcontinent—"presents true stories of the Indian Subcontinent . . . presented by people from all over the world." After these introductory statements, the film shows about three dozen historic photographical images, one after the other. The camera zooms in or out, moves slowly across the images. A violin sets in; the music is now emotional and powerful. Each photograph is accompanied by an inscription: "He was the first Cricket captain to play England," "She was a widow who dared to change her world," or "They found new friends in Andaman." After three and a half minutes, the grayish-brown, stained background appears again, with the discreet white flower graphics. "These are your stories," the film tells the viewer, "and your stories make our History. Contribute a story today. Visit www.indianmemoryproject.com."

This corporate video[1] introduces the Indian Memory Project, an online archive founded by an Indian woman in 2010. While established heritage institutions often carry out online memory production based on historic material, new actors who are not institutionally bound also increasingly enter the field of memory production on the Internet. This raises questions about how digital possibilities transform the production of memory based on historic material.

Digitalization and online dissemination of historic photographs, objects, and documents can be a way to reach large audiences, who may consequently get involved in practices of collectively and individually remembering the past and contributing to the production of new collective memories. As new and potentially numerous stakeholders gain access to documents, objects, and narratives of the past through digital means, the social space of memory production is itself reconfigured, potentially opening up new cosmopolitan possibilities. In this article, I analyze such processes through a focus on two recently created digital archives, based on historic photographs from India and audiovisual material on the India-Pakistan partition, respectively.

These two archives, named the Indian Memory Project and the 1947 Partition Archive (hereinafter referred to as IMP and 1947 PA, respectively), are particularly successful in engaging online communities in commemorative practices. They collect and provide historical content as the basis for an evocation of memories and an exchange of thoughts. They foster a memorizing that seems to be lacking. The IMP aims to create a larger narrative of the past through a decidedly bottom-up approach, as expressed in the line "these are your stories and your stories make our History." The 1947 PA aims at a topic that has in the organization's view been insufficiently memorized, proclaiming, "Shockingly there exists no memorial or public archive devoted to Partition . . . so we decided to create one" (corporate video).[2] The Internet becomes the appropriate medium for creating memories on these aspects of the Indian past, not least because the archives offer online platforms for communication at a time when social and digital media have become established as accessible discussion contexts. But contextual conditions are not the only factor for effectively involving large numbers of people in an online commemorative exchange. In the following analysis of the India-based online archives, I argue that their particular applied practices of presenting, communicating, and using social media also facilitate these successful forms of collective online memory production.

The practices of the two analyzed archives give the impression of a more open and sharing economy of memory production. These can be understood as contrasting archives' and other institutions' regulating and controlling aspects. This proves true for the mentioned Indian online archives in regard to the less restricted use of and access to the provided material, as well as the numbers of users. But the assumption becomes contested when considering the self-portrayal of these archives, as the last part of this article does. They turn out not to be a strict antipode to established archives but rather aim at becoming acknowledged heritage agents themselves.

The Indian Memory Project and the 1947 Partition Archive

Social and digital media have become a standard of communication in many parts of the world. In Europe, an estimated 81 percent of the population uses the Internet, as do almost 89 percent of North Americans. Facebook use is calculated at 48 percent of the European population and 62 percent of North Americans (Internet World Stats 2017b, 2017c). India has an estimated 462 million Internet users as of January 2017, which accounts for 35 percent of the population, but this has increased almost sixfold in two years and is likely to increase further.[3] Not least, the Free Basics/Internet.org initiative launched by Facebook in 2014 (and eventually banned in India in 2016) and the 157 million Indian Facebook users emphasize that the Indian population joins the worldwide trend toward an increasing use of the Internet and social media (Internet World Stats 2017a).[4]

The Indian Memory Project

In this framework, the IMP collects, digitizes, and curates historic photographs from India online. On its website, the archive offers visitors a collection of about 170 photographic images related to the history of the Indian subcontinent. Each of the photographs has a narrative applied to it, which enables the teller not only to recollect a personal memory associated with the photograph but also to share it with a larger user group. In a subjective, sometimes emotional manner, a relative or friend of the depicted person tells their story, a particularly memorable event, or biographical milestones. The photo and the story are posted with explanatory hyperlinks (mostly redirecting to Wikipedia) and tags on the website and are published for the general online audience to read and engage with them.

This engagement is expressed online in responses from users in the commentary section right below every entry on the website. These responses range from "very interesting read" to more complex additions, aiming at providing more information on the past or individuals' personal histories. Under some entries, entire conversations take place, often involving people who somehow were once acquainted with the persons whose stories and images are told and shown, but also people who are not related to the story. A 1930s Anglo-Indian love story, for example, generated online interaction between users from India, Great Britain, and New Zealand,[5] recounting how they knew the people in the photograph or that they went to the same school. Two users established further contact beyond the website by exchanging e-mail and postal addresses. Some shared their offline experiences that happened in the aftermath of reading the story and seeing the image online. Users have effectively engaged with the story and with each other through the comment section of the website. They appropriate the shared memory and respond to it as a testimony of the past. How much this is also the case with the several times larger number who shared the story without comment is subject to debate. But in this case, almost eight thousand people shared—and supposedly read and understood—the story without writing commentary. Via Facebook, 1,700 people liked it. The more qualitative written comments together with the numbers indicate that the entries at the IMP can transform individual memories into a more multiple and collective phenomenon of memorizing. Personal memories are told online and subsequently received, read, and appropriated by an international and potentially extensive public audience. The exchange influences knowledge and ideas of the past. The online comments suggest the evolvement of a shared or even collective memory across long distances between people who might have never met face to face.

The frame for the cosmopolitan exchange of thoughts and memories is given through the mentioned development of the Internet and social media use. It fosters conceptions of being consumer and producer in the online space at the same time. In line with this, the IMP has a crowdsourcing approach and asks people to contribute photographs and stories. A formal requirement is that a pre-1990 photo must be the basis for the narrative. The story that comes with the photograph should be roughly between five hundred and three thousand words, and Anusha Yadav, the founder and owner of the archive, edits the submitted stories as necessary. The story is subsequently made available through the website, which through its setup, search options, and Web 2.0 options frames the stories. In this context, the website's overall numerical contribution to online memory production can be grasped by more than 1.2 million views after running for six years, 170 entries, 3,000 keywords, and 810 themes. Simultaneously, parts of the IMP's entries are published through the project's Facebook account, which further extends the range of this online archive, its content, and the activity related to it. The IMP has in this way become a virtual space to share and revive memories.

The 1947 Partition Archive

The 1947 PA shares many characteristics with the IMP. It is also a rather recently founded online archive that gathers an online community interested in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Based on audiovisual narratives of people who lived through the India-Pakistan partition in 1947, it archives interviews that have been recorded within the past six years. Shortened written versions of the interviews, summarizing the experiences and biographies of the interviewed, are published along with one or several photographs on the website. Each of the currently 3,400 published entries has visually dominant Web 2.0 options attached to it, which allow it to be shared via Facebook, Pinterest, Reddit, Google Plus, Twitter, and e-mail, or as a direct link. Furthermore, a frequent newsletter announces the recently recorded interviews, sharing the interviewees' photos and the first paragraph of their stories. The most active engagement with the memories shared through the 1947 PA takes place on Facebook. The 1947 PA accumulated more than 700,000 followers by mid-2017, with the number increasing steadily. As with the IMP, the comments found under each entry range from general declarations of support and approval to precise information or supplements relating to the stories that have been posted. Additionally, a relatively large number of comments relate to place and displacement, especially sharing memories of the (former) home on the other side of today's borders between India and Pakistan or Bangladesh. Single entries reach up to a few dozen comments, 1,200 likes, and 500 shares.

Like the IMP, the 1947 PA deploys a crowdsourcing strategy by posting public calls for content online. But the 1947 PA's crowdsourcing approach goes even further by training people through a webinar to become what it calls Citizen Historians. A Citizen Historian has been taught basic etiquette and procedures for conducting oral history interviews, as well as basic video recording techniques. Everyone with Internet access can partake in the webinars; most Citizen Historians come from India or Pakistan and are between 18 and 35 years old. They subsequently go out to collect audiovisual material for the archive and simultaneously work as multipliers in making the archive and its intention known. While the call for contributing archival material is posted online, the Citizen Historians spread this call and conduct interviews as an active measure to expand the 1947 PA. The crowdsourced character, which figures prominently in both the 1947 PA and the IMP, helps the archive to gain influence and recognition.

Memory Production Online

The two archives' intense engagement shows that there is an interested online community eagerly wanting to produce, revive, and share memories and a need to have a (virtual) space to do so. The archives established these virtual spaces by setting up websites and Facebook pages. The memories created here can be understood as what have been called "digital memories" (Garde-Hansen et al. 2009) or "new media memories" (Neiger et al. 2011: 241–288). They are situated within a general trend of increasing use of the Internet and social media that has arguably led to a shift in commemorative practices and the use of different media as memory repositories. As Jose van Dijck (2007) points out, digital media involve a shift from commemorating toward identity formation and experience. They turn out to be more a device of sharing and experiencing than of preserving. With the medium becoming more mutable, its purpose turns from the long term to in the moment without abolishing its memorial potential altogether. Digital media do not imply a total negation of commemorative qualities but indicate a shift of emphasis (Van Dijck 2007). The two archives in question evince both qualities. They are and use digital media decidedly for commemorative practices, as they are focusing on aspects of South Asia's past. They relate to the

past, as well as a present that is characterized by changes and flux. At the same time, the use of Web 2.0 options and social media platforms fosters the sharing and experiencing facets and thus caters to the more fluid aspects of digital media.

Furthermore, through new media the past is potentially more visible and accessible. It becomes more revocable and subject to collective influence and shaping (Hoskins 2009). This new memory ecology (Hoskins 2011) allows a more static and retrospective documentation to be transformed more easily and influenced in multiple ways by an increased number of people. It has led to numerous instances of digitally influenced memory making, coming with both a celebration of decentralization and fears of arbitrariness (see, for example, Garde-Hansen et al. 2009; Neiger et al. 2011). The IMP and the 1947 PA with their constant additions, be it by the organizers or the larger online public, fall in line with the new memory ecology. It allows a commemorative engagement that is not limited to physical proximity or access based on expertise but engages the interested online community with documents and stories of the past, which they simultaneously cocreate.

But it is not only external circumstances that make the two websites examples of effective cocreation of online memories. Three factors, I argue, which both the IMP and the 1947 PA employ, are important in the process of turning the websites into actively used virtual spaces for memory production.

The first one is a proactive utilization of social media and a sustainable communication of the archives' development through these channels. The 1947 PA regards online platform communication as one of its core tasks; it employs a staff member—those running it recently acquired funds for paid staff—assigned to the archive's social media presence and two social media and editorial assistants. They regularly post developments and the latest interview summaries on their social media platforms and make them known through newsletters. Recently, they took up Instagram as another social media outlet. Similarly, but with fewer staff members involved, the IMP makes use of social media. Yadav from the IMP considers sharing and online communication an essential part of her work in general. She states, "I do advertising all the time in the sense that I make use of social media very well. I tweet about it, I have a Facebook page, and I've also found ways in which advertising works in my favor. The main part is to be inclusive" (interview, February 2016). Additionally, it must be noted that both projects are not limited to a certain time frame or a project life span. They can run continuously, as long as the founders and teams involved are devoted to them. This secures a sustainability in the promotion and communication of the archives and consequently contributes to an ongoing engagement of users. Unlike other digitization projects that might lie idle after the project ends and funds run dry, the IMP and the 1947 PA are dependent not on project money and staff but on the commitment of the involved organizers. The crowdsourced financial character of the projects has supported this approach so far. Conversely, a constant raising of funds is also required if the archives are to become larger bodies, as is currently the case with the 1947 PA.

Another characteristic that these two archives share is the inclusiveness on the interface. Both archives try to be integrative, stressing communication and sharing of the content and developments of their archives as essential parts of their work. They manage to activate the online community interested in the Indian past to submit their documents and stories, either by online calls for contribution or by a network of multipliers (i.e., the Citizen Historians of the 1947 PA). But the website designs and the intense use of Facebook also play into the idea of being inclusive. Internet users are by now mostly accustomed to being prosumers, that is, to produce as well as to consume content. The archives consequently cater to this habit, as they arrange the gathered material online in a way that encourages people to not only read but also comment, exchange thoughts, and share the provided as well as the added content. Memory production is not done

alone or in an exclusive way by an elite anymore but instead becomes a collaborative practice in an (online) context with participation as a prevalent option.

The two archives create a form of shared memory. They are collections of individual memories but also collective memories, if we define these, like Maurice Halbwachs ([1939] 1980), as memories shared by a group of people. The commemorative processes taking place at the IMP and the 1947 PA are exchanges of alive and individual memories between firsthand witnesses and descendants, as well as a larger group of unrelated Internet users. The memories are distributed, and the online community consequently receives them, engaging in collective commemorative practices and turning the memories into shared ones. These processes can be understood as contrasting a more authoritative and institutionalized history production. The inclusive character of online memory production not only engages people but also contributes to a production of the past that challenges more established collective ideas of it. That is not to say that the memory production as exercised through the IMP and the 1947 PA replaces the production of widely recognized and accepted forms of written history. However, the digital, with its bottom-up approach, becomes a relevant factor and allows personal memories to contribute to a larger whole—in this case, an idea of the Indian past.

The third important factor for engaging interested people in online commemorative practices is the setup of the websites' content. Both the IMP and the 1947 PA present narratives, which correspond to or are based on visual or audiovisual material. These narratives are not so much a factual list of events but rather emotional recollections of individual memories. Stories are presented and discussed here. They might not be historically significant, but they are personally meaningful. They have powerful emotional effects for both the one who shares the story and the one who perceives it. Making memories remotely accessible can produce empathy at a distance (Garde-Hansen et al. 2009: 11), as is the case here. The personal stories related to the (audio) visual documents in both the IMP and the 1947 PA trigger reactions and comments. They allow for an affective relation to the content. This approach is very different from the methods applied by many institutionally bound archives with Indian photographic content. Online archives such as the Basel Mission Archive, the Fürer-Haimendorf Archive, the SMB-digital of the Staatliche Museen Berlin or the Weltsichten of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, which also provide photographs relating to India's past, offer information in note form. The Fürer-Haimendorf archive, for example (the only digital archive solely dedicated to photographs from the Indian subcontinent), which went online in 2009,[6] lists 14,000 images from South Asia and provides information in a functional way. It lists the metadata related to each photograph and allows the user to filter the entries for example by ethnicity ("genre"), topic or geographic area. Similarly, the digital versions of the other mentioned online archives offer visual surrogates of photographs and other objects, accompanied by metadata and searchable along comparable categories. Some of these digital archives offer sharing and commenting options or allow for the creation of an individual virtual collection. But these redistribution and involvement options seem to be secondary to the information and access provision. If they exist they are hardly used in manner that is visible online (the Basel Mission Archive, for example, has registered a total of 65 comments after running for more than five years). These archives provide primarily information, not stories. They leave a lot of interpretation of the images open and the viewer in charge of making sense of them. This might lead to a less emotional involvement of the users and effectively results in almost no online memory production comparable to what occurs through the IMP and the 1947 PA.[7]

In sum, the 1947 PA and the IMP are applying successful strategies to make their websites spaces for online memory production. They found ways to establish sites for memory production in the context of the Internet, where experiences are usually more shared and commented

on rather than simply individually preserved. Aiming at the involvement of users and a legitimization of their digital platforms through impact, the two archives focus on communication and promotion through various social media formats, the involvement of prosumers, and the provision of stories and images that create empathy. An online exchange is evoked not through requiring expertise in consumption and production but through individual references. This refers to personal memories and individual responses but simultaneously, through the open online exchange, has a strong inclusive character that transforms these stories into collectively shared memories. The websites, with their bottom-up approach, function as an alternative option to top-down written histories. As the IMP states in its corporate video, "These are your stories and your stories make our History." The 1947 PA takes a similar stance when it states in its corporate video, "Shockingly there exists no memorial or public archive devoted to Partition . . . so we decided to create one [in] a grassroots volunteer movement . . . Together we can preserve history, one story at a time."

This participatory approach achieves an emotional attachment through the form itself: being part of content production makes contributors feel valued. Their stories are important and will be made public, hence becoming heard (or read) by a larger audience. This effect of participatory construction of the past has been well documented and analyzed by proponents of oral history for the past 30 years (see Perks and Thomson 2016; Thompson 2000). Since most people engage with the past in personal ways, participating in oral history projects by telling one's own story or experience can lead to emotional attachment to the project, and to ideas of history being valuable (Shopes 2012). And finally, oral history does complicate the workings of political and cultural power and their parts in constructing the past, as it allows multiple, very personal voices to contribute to or even contradict a discourse.

The 1947 PA and the IMP go beyond earlier oral history projects, because they use digital and social media. It is the new technical devices that transform participatory approaches and access facilities in history and memory projects (see Frisch and Lambert 2012), in combination with the promotion of these stories of the past in social media platforms. This allows for greater access, which can be granted through digital recording and an online dissemination on any platform, and extends the sharing and experiencing character of these memories to an extent, where they not only are read or appropriated by experts but actually become relived by a larger online community.

It can certainly be argued that the form of online involvement with the past leads to an overstating of individual, highly personal perspectives. Trained historians or other authorities with the expertise to verify or contest claims or memories online are largely absent. This characteristic of online oral history has been intensely debated, without a definite conclusion as to where to draw the line between the importance of individual accounts and a more widely acknowledged version of history (one might also call it History) as it is presented in textbooks, for example (see Perks and Thomson 2016; Thompson 2000). The 1947 PA and the IMP are certainly not free of conventions and draw on standard versions of written history when setting up the projects with their historical agendas. Yet, as they include a bottom-up approach involving a multitude of voices, they are not bound to endorsing a political agenda or a given historical narrative. Their independence from standard institutional funding supports this.

Future developments and appropriations of the online archives' content remain open. Right now the social media setting creates an atmosphere of sharing and emotional attachment. Online memory production is a way of producing and consuming stories of the past. It leads to active concern and contemplation of individual memories, which are thus turned into shared ones. The use of Web 2.0 options shows that the digital archives are more than quantified registers of personal testimony. Yet, how much this leads to an in-depth understanding of complex historical

events, such as the India-Pakistan partition, depends on future uses of the archives, both online and offline.

Becoming an Online Archive

At the moment, the 1947 PA and the IMP constitute online archives that make successful use of the Internet and social media platforms. But how online memory is produced here contradicts to some extent common Internet characteristics. The Internet is a place of increased velocity. Its fast pace and both the Internet's and social media's tendency to promote brief information bits over more complex stories are conditions for constructing remembering on the fly (Hoskins 2011: 23). The comparatively long narratives that the two digital archives provide contrast this accelerated pace. With a length between five hundred and three thousand words (between two hundred and one thousand words at the 1947 PA), they are not particularly short. One can argue that both archives involve people through the images they disseminate and their visual appearances. And surely an aesthetic quality to the websites makes them appealing and thus engages people. The 1947 PA employs a Web developer for the website, and Yadav from the IMP has academic training in graphic design. So the images of the interviewed people of the 1947 PA, and even more prominently the historic photographs of the IMP, play a role in engaging people, encouraging them to visit the websites and consequently exchange memories and thoughts. Yet, the narratives, as mentioned before, are essential for the two digital archives. In both cases memory production *does* work online, despite (or precisely because of?) the time it requires to take the memories in. Sharing and commenting as subsequent actions after reading the stories offer both fast and more profound or time-consuming options, as the long comments and the likes reveal.

Another characteristic of the Internet is its promised egalitarian approach. It can be used as a tool for creating a transnational space as a facility for widened access. The setup of the IMP and the 1947 PA as online archives can in that regard be understood as scrutinizing established ways of producing collective memories by or through established *lieux de memoire*, as the excerpts from the corporate films have indicated. The Internet could become here an adequate tool to "produce your own history," and falls in line with an increasing demand of contemporary societies to be provided with information 24-7 and the dream of unrestricted and all-encompassing access to knowledge and culture (Parzinger 2015: 22), which can be embodied in online archives. Furthermore, the Web 2.0 features—especially with commenting and feedback options, and to a smaller extent with various sharing and liking buttons—bear the promise of a slight breakup of visual economies, based not least on the Internet's net structure and its being a nonhierarchical transnational space. The 1947 PA and the IMP could theoretically be counterpositions to institutional, hierarchically structured archives as theorists have conceptualized them (Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001; Foucault 1977). Unsatisfied with the institutional omission of recognizing the importance of historical events (1947 PA) or with the restrictive access policies of Indian archives and European implementations of digital possibilities (IMP), they became active to close these gaps and simultaneously challenge existing practices. As Yadav mentions:

> I think our history should be accessible, history should be simple. It's very simple and some stuff should be accessible. There was a very interesting argument on that in one of the sessions where a lot of archivers met in India, and the guy from the museum said, 'These are family jewels. We can't share them with the world.' [They don't share it] because they're just too lazy and there's no funding for it. . . . Because knowledge is power so they'd rather hold on to that power. (interview, February 2016)

Creating online platforms, based on crowdsourcing material and funds, with a decidedly bottom-up approach can put conceptions of archives as restricting entities with rather static ordering systems into question. The IMP and the 1947 PA could not only provoke a more intense sharing of memories and reach a quantitatively larger audience, but also challenge conventional notions of the archive.

But several points subvert such an agenda. First, these two digital spaces share a common self-perception as online *archives*. The 1947 PA and the IMP, despite the stressed demand for access, communication, and interaction, do not eliminate archival practices—namely, ordering and controlling information. They do not advocate scrutiny of the classificatory practices they are actively using. They seem to be trying to establish themselves as archives and thereby apply (new?) ordering aspects in this online environment. They emerge as additional actors in the networks of producers, consumers, objects, infrastructure, and regulations, thereby constituting (digital) archives and enabling their functioning as *lieux de memoire*. Both these digital archives want to be an active and acknowledged part of cultural production, influencing how national and international bodies reflect on historical issues. The two projects represent themselves as memory institutions and archives. They make a claim—for example, through their names and their corporate videos—to be documenting and preserving the past. Their self-portrayal discloses a reference and consequent reinstalling of some conventional concepts of archives, which are also transposed visually and digitally. The initial frame of the IMP's corporate video uses a background in grayish-brown, resembling old, stained paper. The map of India has a historic yellowish touch. The entire film creates an impression of "historicity" and old originals. It plays with the nostalgic aura of historic images and re-creates it visually. It reproduces ideas of the archive as it translates these into audiovisual material. It furthermore stresses the relation to memory, history, and archives, and decidedly claims to be a place in which to write "History" (with a capital "H"). The 1947 PA's corporate video comprises comparable features. It uses a very similar background suggesting historic references. It also refers to itself as contributing to creating memory and writing history (although not with a capital "H"). Both archives peremptorily opt here for a recognition of their status as an archiving institution, thereby reinventing ordering principles that the Internet was supposed to decline/avoid.

The second point relates to the Internet as the platform for the sharing of these archives. They are *online* archives, which makes them accessible and subject to interpretation for everyone, globally. Tangible restrictions of access have been removed or at least reduced, and the World Wide Web provides for an appropriation of the digital archive, irrespective of nationality or distance. Online archives exist within a transnational space that allows content and knowledge embedded therein to move (almost) freely across borders, and permits prosumers to access these contents from virtually everywhere.

Yet, as has been shown elsewhere (see Consalvo and Ess 2011; Wheeler 2011), the egalitarian promise of the Internet does not bear close scrutiny. The Internet is by no means a non-hierarchical space but rather one channeled by economic interests (Serexhe 2015). Popular social media—in this case, Facebook—is one example. By using Facebook as a prime or secondary output, the 1947 PA and the IMP (like many others) support this large media company, its influence, and its economic interests. Facebook's potential as a market-controlling entity contradicts the supposedly egalitarian approach of the Internet. This exemplifies that the Internet does not guarantee a democratic approach or transnationalism. The Internet expands the range of political possibilities, because it "preserves and extends the dialogical character of the public sphere in a potentially cosmopolitan form" (Bohman 2004: 152). It can be a cosmopolitan expansion of participatory public influence, not only for the political, as James Bohman states, but also for cultural and historical production, as the digital archives indicate. Yet, this requires actors who

make the Internet a public sphere that uses the potentials of computer-mediated communication (Bohman 2004). It needs agents who provide and continuously reinvent the context of democratic communication, to transform it into a public sphere that spans across borders and beyond conventional forms of public engagement. Even if we consider the 1947 PA and the IMP as actors who aim for and practice forms of democratic communication, they remain restricted by the users' habitual online communication forms and employment of the Internet as a public sphere.

Furthermore, websites and databases are not levitating units but dependent on technological developments, which are again often driven by economic calculations. The 1947 PA and the IMP rely in setting up their websites and databases on the Internet's and software's modularity. They are free as well as restricted to choose design, plug-ins, and other elements. And like all other digital archives, the 1947 PA and the IMP are structured and determined entities. They are a programmed database with back end, front end, and semantic webs. These components prearrange information retrieval and knowledge circulation. Tagging, keywording, and programming decisions include a certain amount of ordering. The digital archives are programmed, curated, and dependent devices.

This leads to my final point. Among the options digitization offers, the two digital archives decided for very expansive editorial practices. Yadav, as head of the IMP, makes it clear to the contributors and states openly on the website that she edits the narrative before it goes online. So, while sometimes very little changes need to be made for the story to fit with the project's general outline and idea, she sometimes ends up rewriting the whole story, based on pamphlets or little notes. Form and embedded links, as well as the distribution on social media, wrap up the editing process. The 1947 PA also engages the distribution on social media, and the preceding editing process includes a selection of the cases to be summarized online. Writing these summaries and putting them online, usually accompanied by one or multiple images of the original supplier, can be seen as an intervening altering process, done by members of the archive, not by the material suppliers. Thus, both digital archives are quite strongly dependent devices, whose dissemination is regulated by the initiators of the projects. The revising and editing inventions seem stronger than within many institution-based archives, which often aim at digitizing holistically and according to previously set digitizing strategies. Archive-specific hierarchies are not abrogated through digitizing or community-created digital archives but are instead shifted. New, noninstitutionally bound actors now also decide what to collect and how to make it accessible; hence, decision making remains an element of these archives. An order (which is furthermore determined by the Internet and available software) must be given to make the material, which has a decidedly crowdsourced character, accessible online.

Digital Archives as a Future for Engaging People Worldwide?

As the IMP and the 1947 PA show, establishing online archives based on digital or digitized material can be a way to foster encounters between people around the world. The 1947 PA was formed out of a felt need to exchange memories and thoughts on the India-Pakistan partition in particular. As a historic event, this partition (as well as others around the world) continues to be a motif in contemporary politics and conflicts (see Tewari Jassal and Ben-Ari 2007). Discussing the partition publicly remains a complicated and sensitive undertaking, and the partition continues to be a contentious issue. However, disputes and political arguments make up a very small part of the online discussions at the 1947 PA's Facebook page. Single comments condemn the partition or the two-state solution. Even particular politicians and their decisions are denunciated. But by far, the large majority of remarks posted on the website are commiserative statements regarding

the personal experiences told online, supportive words or sympathetic exchanges.[8] The Internet is here primarily a space for sharing memories, not political beliefs. Why this is the case must remain an open question for now. Online exchange spaces offer means of (re)appropriating the past from multiple perspectives and bear prospects for diversified memory practices across borders. Their transnational properties can theoretically play out in a continuation or arousing of conflicts with the Internet as an additional space for this. But the 1947 PA and the IMP employ empathic, sustainable, and inclusive practices that for the most part set up, fill, and promote digital archives as sites for online memory production. Both provide for accessing (parts of) the Indian past and cultural heritage beyond party or national politics.

The large number and the diversity of the users who comment and share on the websites demonstrates that access barriers are lowered through digitizing, even if they are not abolished altogether. Users of the IMP and the 1947 PA come predominantly from India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, as well as from the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. That is due to the content of the websites, the historical conditions of the countries related to that content, and also the social networks of the archive's founders and members. English as the language used for the websites furthermore contributes to a selective user profile, even though comments in Hindi, Urdu, or Bengali occur occasionally. And critical comments do not fail to appear. One user commented on the 1947 PA's Facebook page in March 2016, "I noticed that you guys only interview rich people who survived 1947. I would like to see the narratives of thr [*sic*] poor people who have gone through 1947 as well of ot [*sic*, if it] is possible." The archive immediately responded online, "We record the stories of all people who witnessed Partition, of all socioeconomic backgrounds." However, Guneeta Singh Bhalla, founder of the 1947 PA, mentioned previously in an interview in 2013 that some imbalances regarding the socioeconomic backgrounds of contributors and users exist (Day & Night News 2013). Yadav also mentions that language and Internet access certainly are restricting factors she would be willing to change. She acknowledges that most people contributing to the IMP are essentially connected to the Internet, "and even if they're not, they have relatives who are. So one of the pictures, for example, was a lady who used to be a cook in my house five, three years ago, and she is not online but she got me a photograph and told me her story, and I wrote it down" (interview, February 2016). So even if the Internet allows for large numbers of potential users, it also continues to exclude people from these archives unless they are intentionally engaged. And even though to access the archives' content one does not need the amount of financial and social capital it takes to enter analogue archives, Internet access remains an issue of social stratification. The digital gap continues to deny access, especially to more marginalized people. Online archives *can* involve audiences in an online production of collectively shared memories and thus create a new form of openness. But they are not per se nonhierarchical forms that include everyone. "Indian Memory Project is an online, curated, visual and narrative based archive that traces a history of the Indian Subcontinent,"[9] with all the consequences that online dissemination, editing, visualizing, and narration bring. The online archives are culture encoded in a digital form (Manovich 2001), as they can ease access but also privilege particular versions of anticipating collections in form and content. They are at the same time meaningful for cultural production with transnational capacities and an expression of it.

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▪ **NOTES**

1. "Celebrating Six Years of Indian Memory Project," available at http://www.indianmemoryproject.com/video2016.
2. Available as "Witness Voice: Untold stories of South Asia's Partition" at http://www.1947partitionarchive.org/mission.
3. Numbers according to Statista, "Number of Internet Users in the Asia Pacific Region as of January 2017, by Country (in Millions)," https://www.statista.com/statistics/265153/number-of-Internet-users-in-the-asia-pacific-region; "Number of Internet Users in Selected Countries as of May 2016 (in Millions)," https://www.statista.com/statistics/271411/number-of-internet-users-in-selected-countries.
4. On Free Basics India, see, e.g., Soni (2016).
5. There is no need to state the country of residence when you leave a comment. People, however, sometimes state in their comments where they live or where they are from. Names such as Joe, Radha, Wayne, or Ali can be nothing more than a rough indicator that comments come mostly from South Asia and English-speaking countries.
6. Now available at http://digital.soas.ac.uk/furer/all.
7. This is not to say that institutionally bound online archives and the data included therein are not used, but only to say that commemorative practices hardly happen *online*.
8. The 1947 Partition Archive reflects the sensitivity of the partition issue also in their editorial acts and in public workshops on memorializing partition, where they attempt to answer questions on ethics and education in cooperation with academics and the larger public.
9. See www.indianmemoryproject.com/about.

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