Sikh Narratives: An Analysis of Virtual Diaspora Networks

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This paper explores contemporary Sikh narratives as represented on the World Wide Web. Virtual platforms serve as an outlet of expression for the Sikh diaspora, a community largely characterized by voluntary economic-based migration. As mapping results indicate, community dialogue focuses on questions of identity, culture and religion. The above are often countered with sentiments of injustice and reconciliation linked to the tragic events of 1984: Operation Blue Star. How such narratives weave themselves into community consciousness is analyzed in greater detail within the paper.

e-Diasporas Atlas

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Plateforme e-Diasporas

http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section&section=27.

Abstract

This paper explores contemporary Sikh narratives as represented on the World Wide Web. Virtual platforms serve as an outlet of expression for the Sikh diaspora, a community largely characterized by voluntary economic-based migration. As mapping results indicate, community dialogue focuses on questions of identity, culture and religion. The above are often countered with sentiments of injustice and reconciliation linked to the tragic events of 1984: Operation Blue Star. How such narratives weave themselves into community consciousness is analyzed in greater detail within the paper. This also includes the impact of diasporic demographic realities within various immigration hubs such as Canada, the UK and the US. The paper concludes with discussion on contemporary notions of community consciousness and cultural advocacy. In pursuit of relevancy, the Sikh diaspora continues to promote relatively fluid narrative, the impacts of which are yet to be determined.

Keywords

diaspora, internet, web, migrations, Sikhs

Mots-clefs

diaspora, internet, web, migrations, Sikhs

Decades of voluntary economic migration have provided an extensive network of transnational linkages for members of the Sikh diaspora. Beyond ground realities, contemporary diaspora networks continue to expand online. Based on the Sikh corpus, web based platforms of exchange appear to characteristically focus on questions of religion, community, and culture. Acting as 'cornerstones' of group identity, the above continue to set the parameters of much debate and discussion within the diaspora. In the context of well-established Sikh linkages, this paper investigates the impact of contemporary virtual networks. It questions the influence of the world wide web (here after web), in provoking sentiments of community within the greater Sikh diaspora. Such sentiments often incite ever-evolving debates surrounding the boundaries of entrenched communal values, norms, and beliefs. As a contemporary platform of exchange, the web can just as easily streamline narratives as it can divide them.

With migration largely beginning in the 1960s, web based networks have by and large reinvigorated internal sentiments of pride and nostalgia within Sikh networks. For some however, this extends beyond conceptions of culture to past unresolved political grievances of the greater panth (community)[1]. Although largely defunct, we can note such variance within pockets of the corpus vis-a-vis calls for Sikh statehood (Khalistan) in Punjab, India, which gained considerable momentum during the 1980s.

Beyond diaspora dialogue, online activity has come to compliment physical manifestations of host-homeland relations. As in the case of the Sikh diaspora, exchanges of information often take place within religious platforms. This often also includes personal blogging which is characteristically far more interpersonal, reflective and expressive then that of news based websites. This paper focuses on the nature of such websites along with the virtual trends of the greater Sikh diaspora. To exhaustively uncover the dominant trends of online activity, the paper begins with a short recollection of the origins of migration of the Sikhs. This includes questioning the exchange, transmission and 'flow' of information between respective websites and actors.

Sikh Baseline Grievances - Physical Platforms

Beyond contemporary host-homeland linkages, the Sikh diaspora is largely considered to be an economic based migrant community. The majority of immigration occurred in the 1960s where notable pockets were formed in the UK, Vancouver and Toronto Canada[2]. As of 2005, notable Sikh pockets are as followed: 336,179 in the UK, 278,415 e in Canada and 250,000 in the US[3]. Even prior to the 1960s, from the 1860s to the 1940s, many Sikh men were recruited by UK authorities as police and military personnel[4]. Records indicate that as early as the 1910s some 8,000 Sikh's were noted to have migrated to North America[5]. For many members of the diaspora, links to British colonial powers often carries with it a sense of historical significance and pride, especially in the context of war related services.

More importantly however, the above highlight that beyond symbolic importance, Sikh narratives promoting communal sentiments of host-homeland unity have had multiple opportunities to flourish. Beyond contemporary virtual platforms, motivations surrounding physical network linkages have existed for decades. At the most extreme, this has included calls for statehood, which although not new, continue to be revived on a cyclical basis. This was noted most recently in 2009, during the 25th anniversary of Operation Blue Star, a military action in which, in response to increased separatist protests and militancy, then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered armed forces to swarm the holiest of Sikh shrines; the Golden Temple. A day of massive pilgrimage, some 200,000 were estimated dead[6].

The BBC Asian Network aired "Blue Star 25 Years" a documentary focusing on the impact the events had on Sikhs living in the UK, including interviews with those who even today support the creation of the Sikh state of Khalistan[7]. Debates

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1. *Panth* is often used to explain the idea of a Sikh community. Today it is often used in the phrase 'Khalsa Panth', which again describes theocratic Khalistan conceptions.

2. Tatla, D.S and Singh, G. 2006. *Sikhs in Britain*. Zed Books Ltd, Malta, 11.

3. Tatla and Singh 2006: 32

4. Axel, B.K. 'Sikh Domains: Information Technology, Global Conflict, and the Struggles for Khalistan', *Background Paper*, 2.

5. Dusenbery, V A., and Tatla D. 2010. *Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Global Giving for Local Good*. OUP Oxford, 9.

6. Axel, 2

7. "Operation Blue Star 25 Years On: BBC Asian Network

on the future of the Sikh *panth* were also quite extensive online; focusing on diasporic obligations, protest, as well as the (rare) use of violence. Indeed, unresolved past grievances sometimes have the potential to expand into full-blown mobilized transnational networks. The web serves as a platform of expansion, where depending on the nature of engagement, network linkages have the potential to both widen in scope and intensify in density. Through mapping, this paper moves beyond baseline physical realities to consider the potential impact of the web on linkages within the Sikh community.

Methodology and Classification

Mapping of the e-diaspora corpus was created by various technological tools and devices (navicrawler, gephi, whois) - all of which are explained in detail in the methodology portion of the atlas. The Sikh corpus (consisting of 290 websites) was classified based on the following:

Type of Website - such a classification alludes to the platform through which interaction occurs. Exchanges can be interactive (two-way) or resemble news presentation style (top-down). Points of emphasis for this classification focused on highlighting the method of interaction, as well as understanding the basis through which information is characteristically exchanged.

Type of actor - this classification treats the source of exchange as an active entity. It is vital to consider the 'source of information' in order to exhaustively investigate whether there is a loose consensus over online debates. Intentional efforts for example can be made to attract support for the greater community grievances through the portrayal of current events by media organizations. Personal blogs by individuals may not carry concrete objectives, however often provoke reflective intimate details of community living. Through an assessment of online actors, one can uncover how virtual 'legitimacy' is allocated and maintained.

Type of Activity - classifying the corpus based on activity uncovers the broad purpose and utility of the web as a platform of dialogue within the Sikh diaspora. The (digital) corpus classification

aspect of the e-diaspora atlas allows for a visual and statistical representation of activity (purpose and interest). This also includes analyzing how activities link and network together.

Language - by classifying language, we can begin to understand key attributes of the audience to which information is being presented/provided to. Levels of inclusion and exclusion may inadvertently be decided by linguistic ability. English for example, characteristically becomes a bridge through which diaspora communities have the capability to engage and add to

homeland discussions. Non-English websites may invoke far more personal, passionate and culturally rooted discussions of community affairs. It may also indicate a far more fundamentalist position of community affairs, especially in the context of religious affiliation. Hence, as opposed to a filtration process (as described above), language can be used to implicitly market and advertise particular (grievance) dialogue to specific community members.

Country & Location - largely due to the complexity of online IP geographic identification corpus classification based on location admittingly remains fairly loose. Blogs for example are self-defined by the user and thus are relatively untraceable unless otherwise indicated. A considerable amount of websites are classified as blogs within the Sikh corpus (36%, 104 out of 290 nodes)[8]. Through inferences, we can uncover and question the implications of such website platform commonalities within the corpus.

Through visual and statistical representation of the virtual Sikh community, the e-diaspora atlas provides the necessary information to question how the web increasingly facilitates transnational linkages. Indeed, virtual platforms allow for the non-static flow of community interaction. This can occur based on both interest and necessity. Both inside and outside of the diaspora, this paper explores the virtual linkages of Sikh transnational networks.
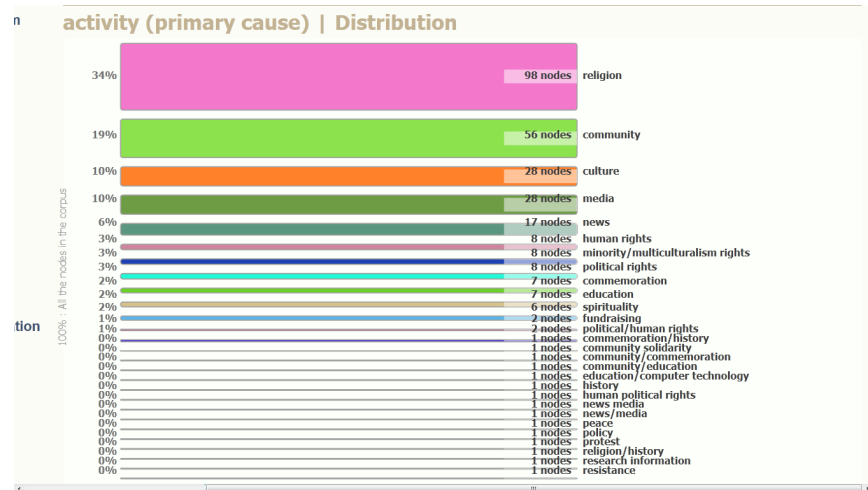
Virtual Platforms: Sikh e-diaspora Atlas

As previously mentioned, the greater Sikh diaspora has its origins in voluntary economic

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Remembers Amritsar – May 25 2009" <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/05_may/29/blue_star.shtml>

8. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3&section=27
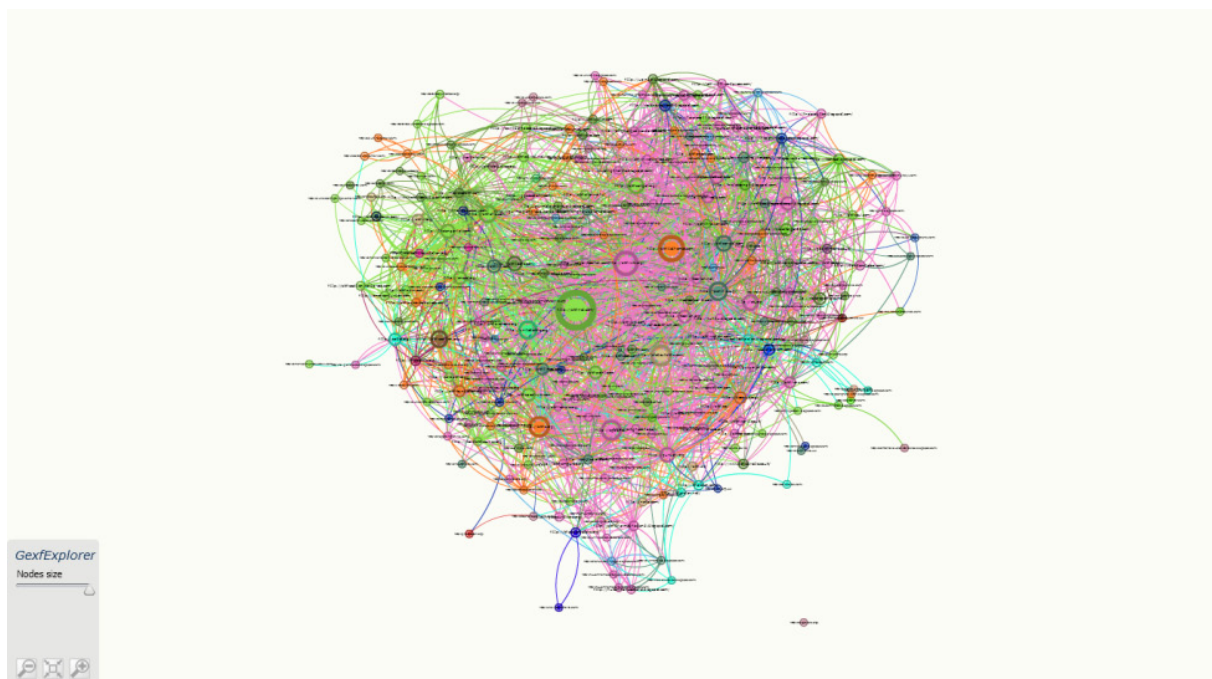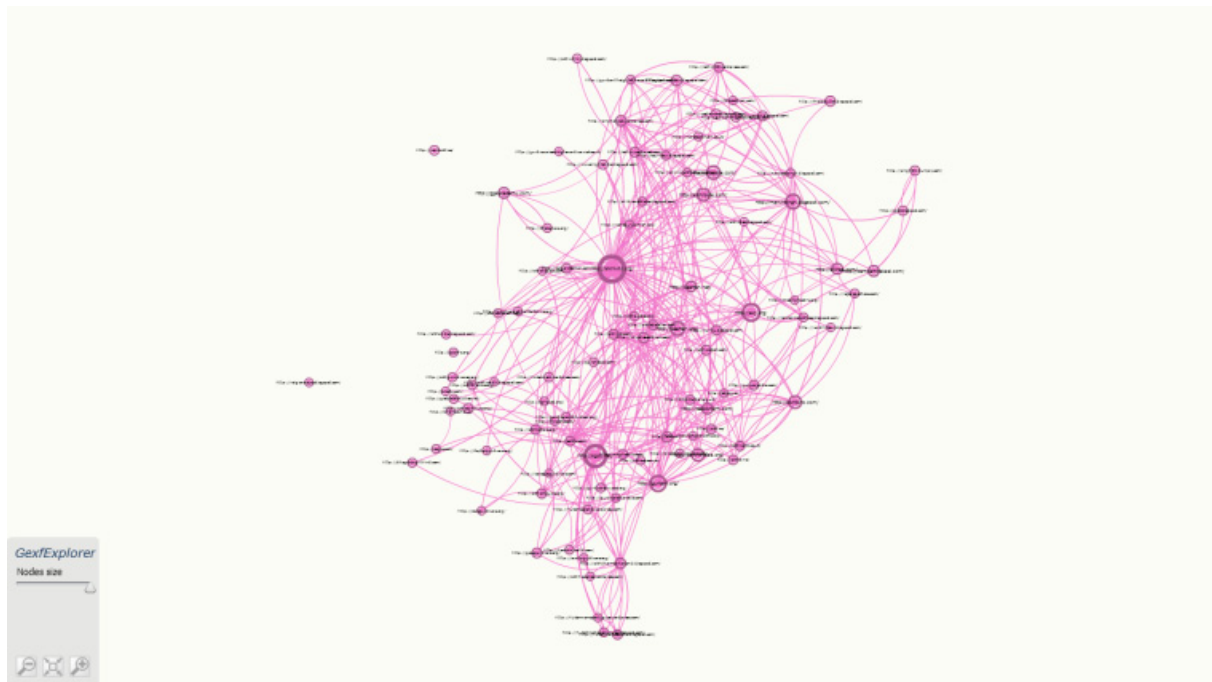
migration. This translates to a community which in both physical and virtual capacities finds much utility in arousing commonly accepted entrenched narratives. The corpus divides for example, into very distinctive networked clusters when isolated for primary activity. Below we note the importance of religion within greater Sikh virtual platforms. In addition, religious and community based networks, while divided, are interlinked when considering the sheer variance of sites within the corpus[9].

With sikhnet.com focusing on community, sikhiwiki.org focusing on religion and sikhitothemax.com focusing on culture; we note the diversity of key node authorities within the corpus.

It is clear from the above map isolation, that religion indeed has a substantial influence on Sikh virtual platforms. If further isolated, we can note the intricate networked linkages of sites classified to be primarily religious (98 nodes, 34% of primary activity).

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9. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27

With an inbound density of 2.3% and an outbound density of 3.3%, religious based sites are slightly «in deficit»[10]. Meaning, that networks of such sites characteristically span beyond internal linkages. Religious commonality remains the principle basis of unity for the Sikh diaspora. At the discretion of the individual moreover, religion can carry with it various sets of connotations and commitments. This exists within both physical and virtual platforms, where religion, community and culture often induce varied sentiments of allegiance for respective populations.

The intrinsic links between community and culture are visible in both the external attracting authorities and external source hubs as presented below. Such statistics once again reaffirm inter-linkages between religion, community and culture. The importance of key corpus authorities: *sikhnet.com* (community activity with 68 inbound edges) and *sikhitothemax.com* (cultural activity with 40 inbound edges) are validated by the outbound and inbound linkages to religious based sites.

10. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27

EXTERNAL ATTRACTING AUTHORITIES

Nodes *outside* religion

that *are cited by* the most nodes *in religion*

Node name	Inbound edges FROM religion
http://sikhnet.com/ (community)	68
http://sikhitothemax.com/ (culture)	40
http://allaboutsikhs.com/ (education)	29
http://sikhs.org/ (culture)	29
http://unitedsikhs.org/ (peace)	21
http://panthic.org/ (news)	18
http://sikhsangat.com/ (news)	16
http://sikhsangat.org/ (community)	15
http://sikhspectrum.com/ (community)	14
http://rajkaregakhalsa.net/ (media)	13

External Source Hubs

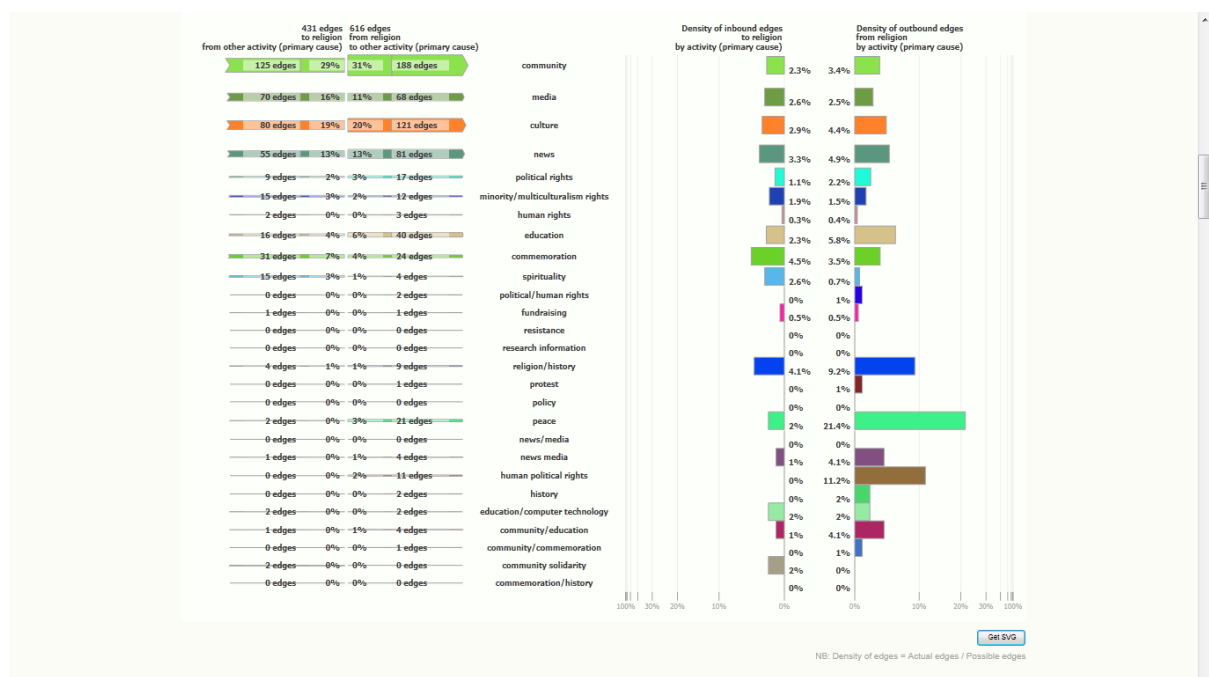**Nodes *outside* religion**
that *cite* the most nodes *in religion*

Node name	Outbound edges TO religion
http://boss-uk.org/ (culture)	24
http://worldsikhcouncil.org/ (community)	15
http://khalsa.com/ (community)	11
http://thesikhdirectory.com/ (community)	10
http://upinder.blogspot.com/ (media)	10
http://mistakesingh.blogspot.com/ (commemoration)	10
http://singhangad.blogspot.com/ (culture)	10
http://singhsrus.blogspot.com/ (news)	8
http://sikhnet.com/ (community)	8
http://panthrattan.com/ (commemoration)	8

Sources of cultural familiarity are often necessary to push community networks forward. This is especially the case for migrant communities largely rooted in economic incentives (not contentious conflict). Often through contemporary calls for recourse and justice; conflict based migrants instinctively link the host and homeland on a transnational scale. Grievances focusing on the loose ends of mass exodus (characteristic of conflict generated diasporas) do not exist for the Sikhs; baseline sources of cohesion therefore remain rooted in personal identity and community interaction. Transnational networks as a result, are far more open to wide scale debate and interpretation. Religion is not particularly flexible when compared to community and culturally rooted activities. However, without fixed boundaries, virtual platforms provoke the expansion of values, norms and ideals - all of which collectively propel the relevance of host-homeland linkages amongst diaspora populations. It follows that corpus density statistics below highlight a (minimal) trend of slightly higher outbound edges from religious based web activity to community, culture, and news based web activities[11].

With densities running relatively parallel for the above categories, it is clear that corpus activities are fairly interactive. Through the flexibility and openness of virtual platforms moreover, religious web based activities can vary immensely site to site. Referred to by 89 exterior nodes and citing 131 nodes, we note this in *sikhiwiki*.

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11.   http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27&value=religion
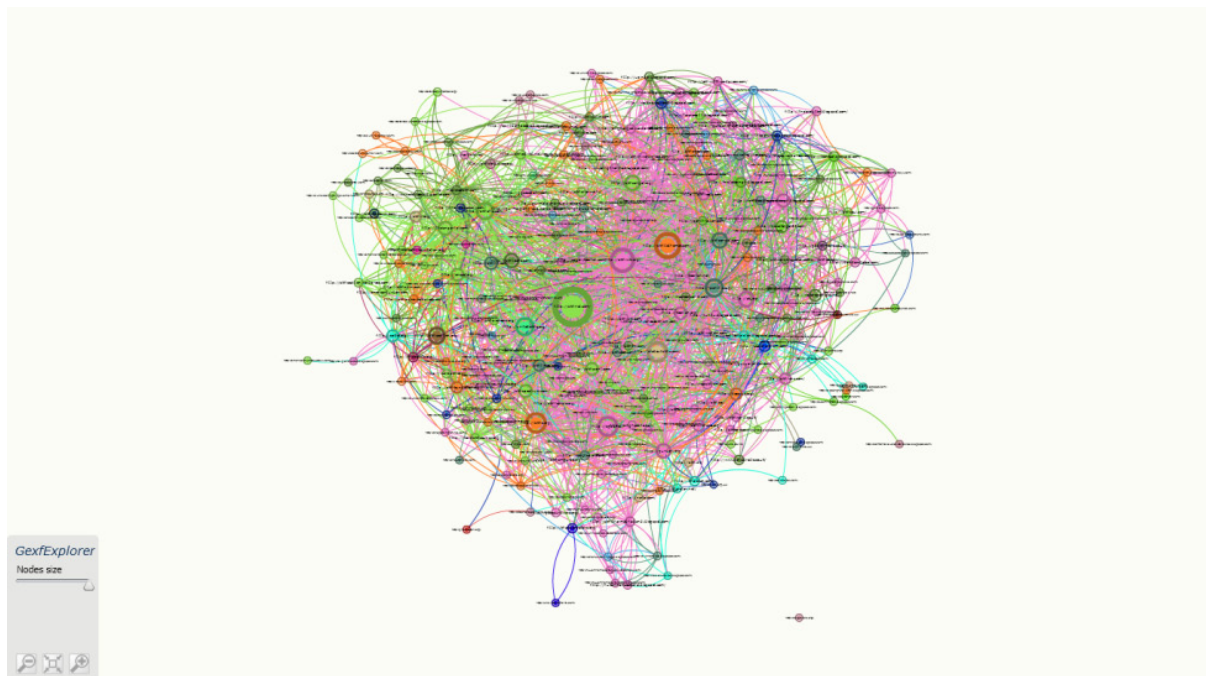
org a key authority within the greater corpus[12]. Classified secondarily as an education based activity site, sikhiwiki.org acts as a virtual reference encyclopedia. Although a visible online authority, the intensity and concentration of information on sikhiwiki.org highlights that perceptions surrounding religion can in actuality constitute and include numerous community characteristics.

We can also take note of this trend through a community based isolation of the Sikh corpus which accounts for 19% (56 nodes) of the isolated corpus. The structural influence of religion over Sikh virtual platforms remains noteworthy.

However, it is interesting to note the overall impact of community nodes within the corpus platform. *Sikhnet.com* for example, is the largest authority of the entire corpus. Citing just 21 nodes, *sikhnet.com* is referred to by 168 external nodes[13]. Visual representations below illustrate the overarching influence of *sikhnet.com* within community portions of the corpus, along with its networking capabilities with respect to religious clustering (as visible on the right side of the corpus).

12. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=72&map=59&node=219&section=27

13. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=72&map=59&node=149&section=27

Representative Authorities

**Nodes *inside* community
that *are cited by* the most nodes *in other activity (primary cause)***

Node name	Inbound edges FROM other activity (primary cause)
http://sikhnet.com/	136
http://sikhchic.com/	41
http://sikhsangat.org/	37
http://sikhspectrum.com/	23
http://thelangarhall.com/	22
http://ensaaf.org/	20
http://sikhpoint.com/	20
http://spiritbornpeople.blogspot.com/	11
http://sikhchannel.tv/	9
http://sikhpioneers.org/	8
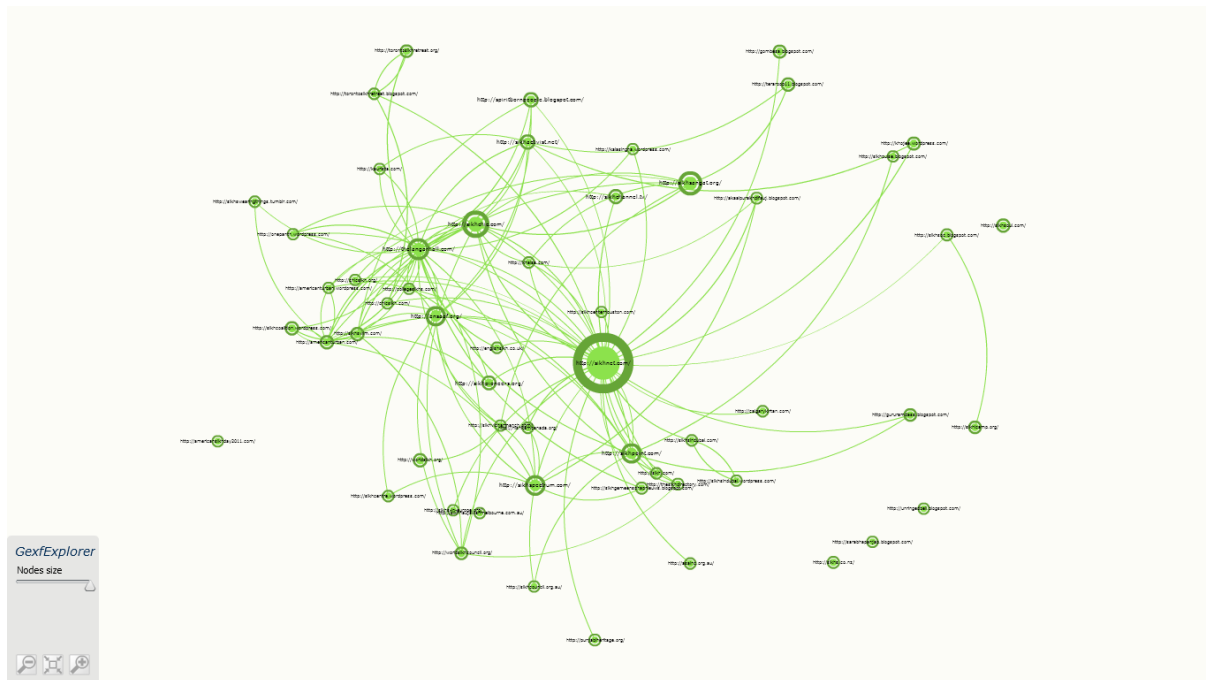
Statistics below further emphasize the expansionary links of community relative to virtual platforms. We note the external attracting authorities below, and the diverse set of node activity (beyond community).
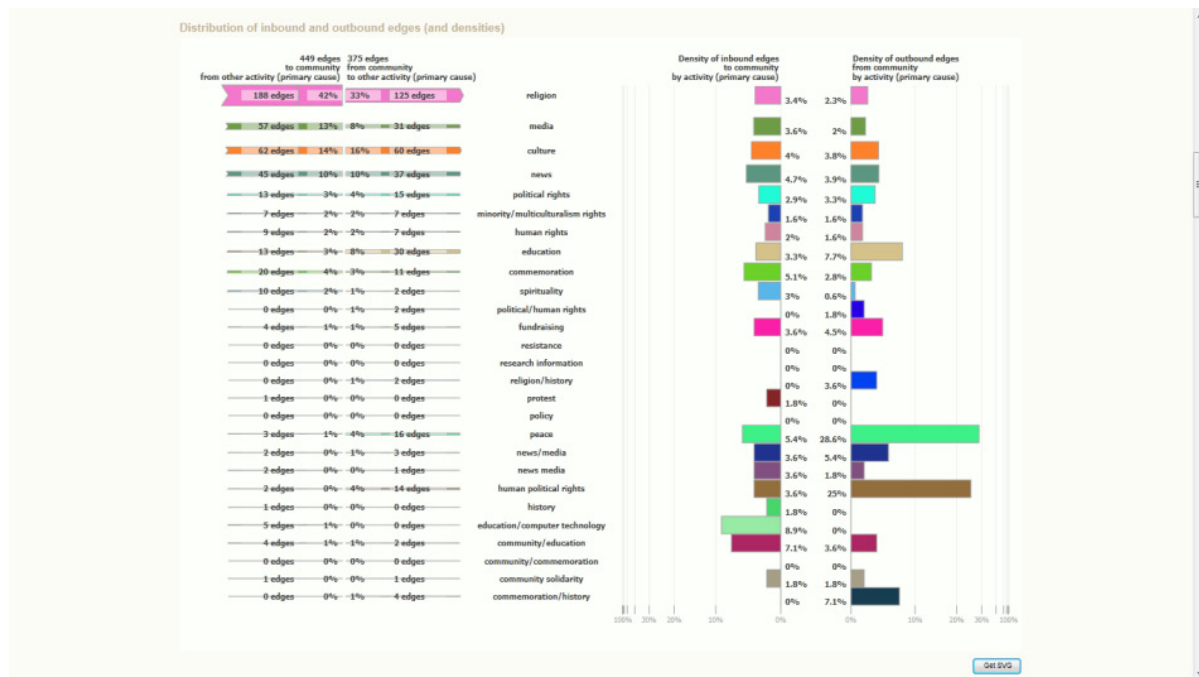
EXTERNAL ATTRACTING AUTHORITIES

**Nodes *outside* community
that *are cited by* the most nodes *in community***

Node name	Inbound edges FROM community
http://sikhiwiki.org/ (religion)	18
http://sikhitothemax.com/ (culture)	17
http://unitedsikhs.org/ (peace)	16
http://sikhs.org/ (culture)	16
http://sgpc.net/ (religion)	14
http://sikhcoalition.org/ (human political rights)	14
http://allaboutsikhs.com/ (education)	14
http://sikhtoons.com/ (media)	11
http://sikhnn.com/ (news)	9
http://sikhri.org/ (education)	8

With an inbound density of 3.4% and an outbound density of 2.9%, networked linkages of community based activities are slightly «in profit»[14]. This trend is also visible in a large proportion of the primary activity classifications below.

14. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27&value=community

In addition, we note the considerable deficit with respect to web based educational activity nodes (3.3% inbound density to 7.7% outbound density). External nodes following a more informative approach likely establish links with education based sites through similarities in presentation method. In presenting information to the diaspora, such nodes may take on a comparatively stronger fact based approach to religion, community, culture, news and media. These nodes may focus on disseminating knowledge beyond the greater community - as such promote a non-threatening learning based platform. While noteworthy, only 7 nodes (2% out of 290 nodes) are classified as education based sites, hence the impact of the above outbound correlations are rather minor in the context of greater Sikh virtual activity.
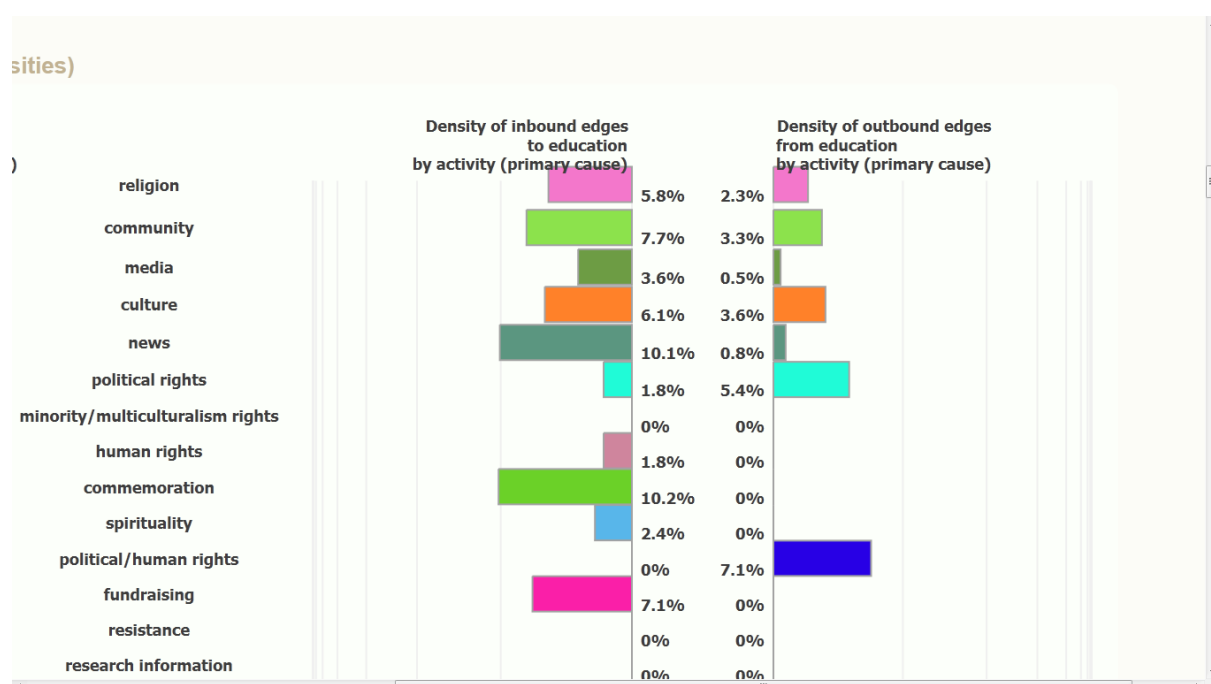
Networks rooted in culture highlight similar virtual trends as that of religious and community based activity. As illustrated in the isolation below, *sikhitothemax.com* remains the key influencing authority within the

classification (comprised of 28 nodes). This is also the case within the greater corpus, where *sikhitothemax.com* is cited by 97 nodes; citing only one external node: *sikhnet.com*, the most cited node of the entire corpus.
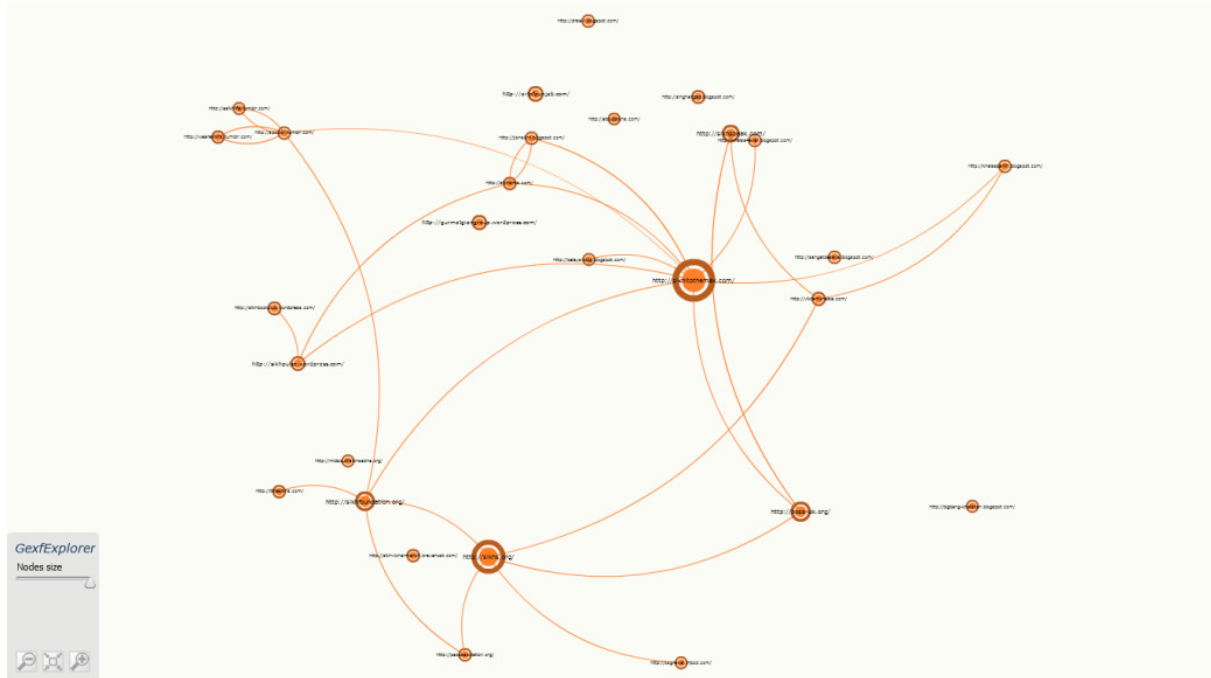
Culturally rooted virtual activities are particularly unique through the noted use of personal blogs as platforms of exchange. For example, we observe that 57% (16 nodes out of 28) of all cultural sites are classified as blogs[15]. Statistics focusing on

actor distribution further solidify this trend, with 50% of cultural actors categorized as individual bloggers.

15. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27&value=culture
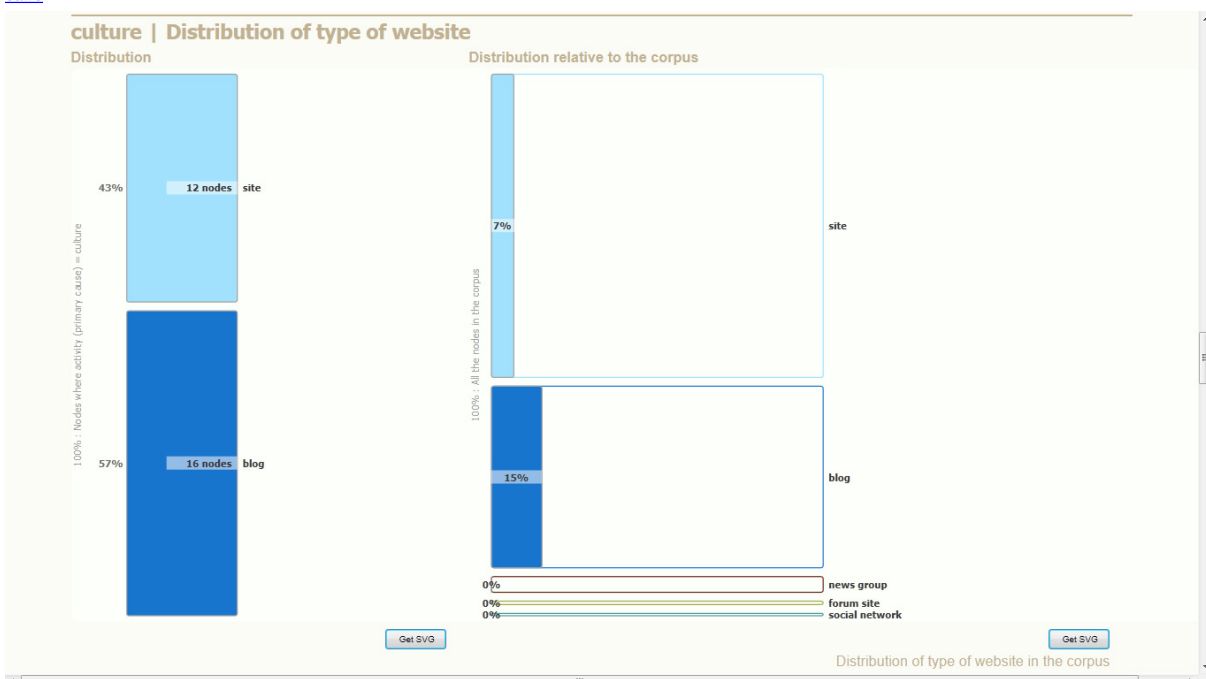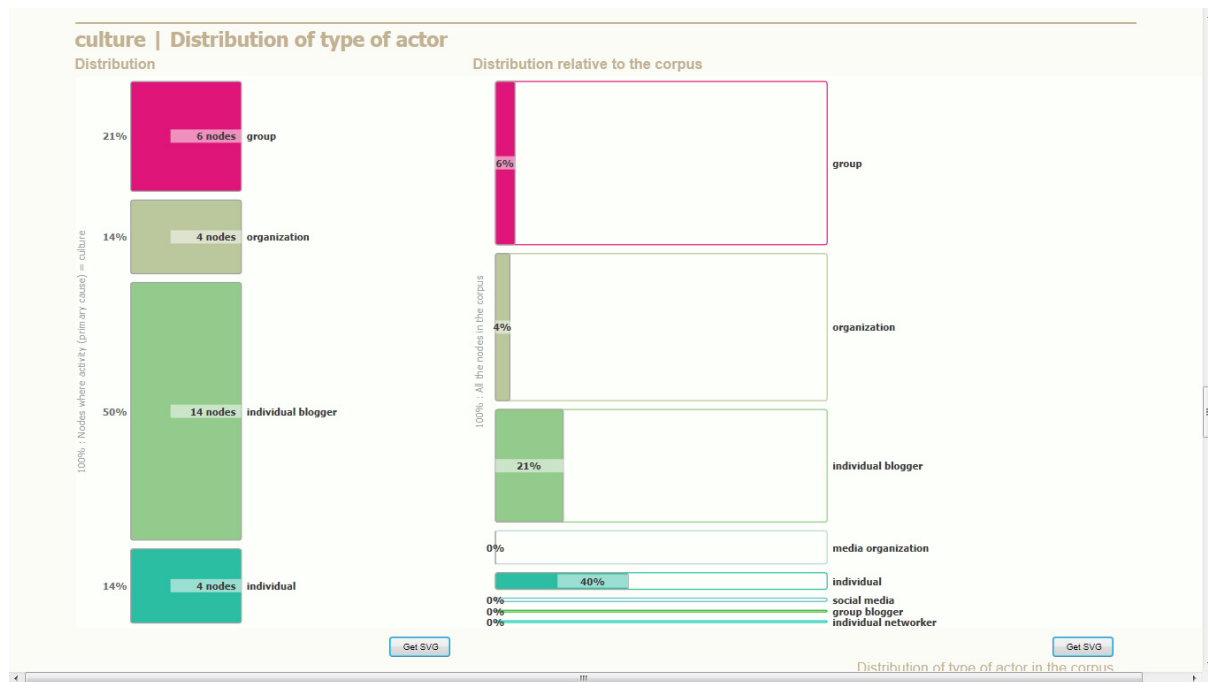
As indicated by the graphical representation below, blogging activity is concentrated to the top right of the corpus[16]. Moreover, although interactive, with an outbound density of 3.7%, and an inbound density of 0.7%, blog exchanges are largely 'in deficit'[17].

16. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3&section=27

17. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3&section=27&value=blog

Isolating actors for individual bloggers (in the above graph), further emphasizes the visible clustering at the top right of the Sikh corpus[18]. With an inbound density of 1% and an outbound density of 3.8%, individual blogger statistics reaffirm 'in deficit' patterns of network blogging exchanges. Clustering of blog based activity on the top right of the corpus also correlates with religious based activities (as visible in the isolation of religious nodes). Strategically, we can predict that blog-gers intentionally cite key corpus authorities and hubs in order to increase their own opportunities of visibility and readership. External attracting authorities reaffirm this through the unbalanced inbound/outbound densities ('in deficit' blog-ging) links to key corpus authorities. We note for example, that the top three nodes cited by blogs (*sikhnet.com, sikhitothemax.com, sikhiwini. org*) are also the top three authorities of the entire corpus[19].

18. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=4&section=27&value=individual%2Bblogger

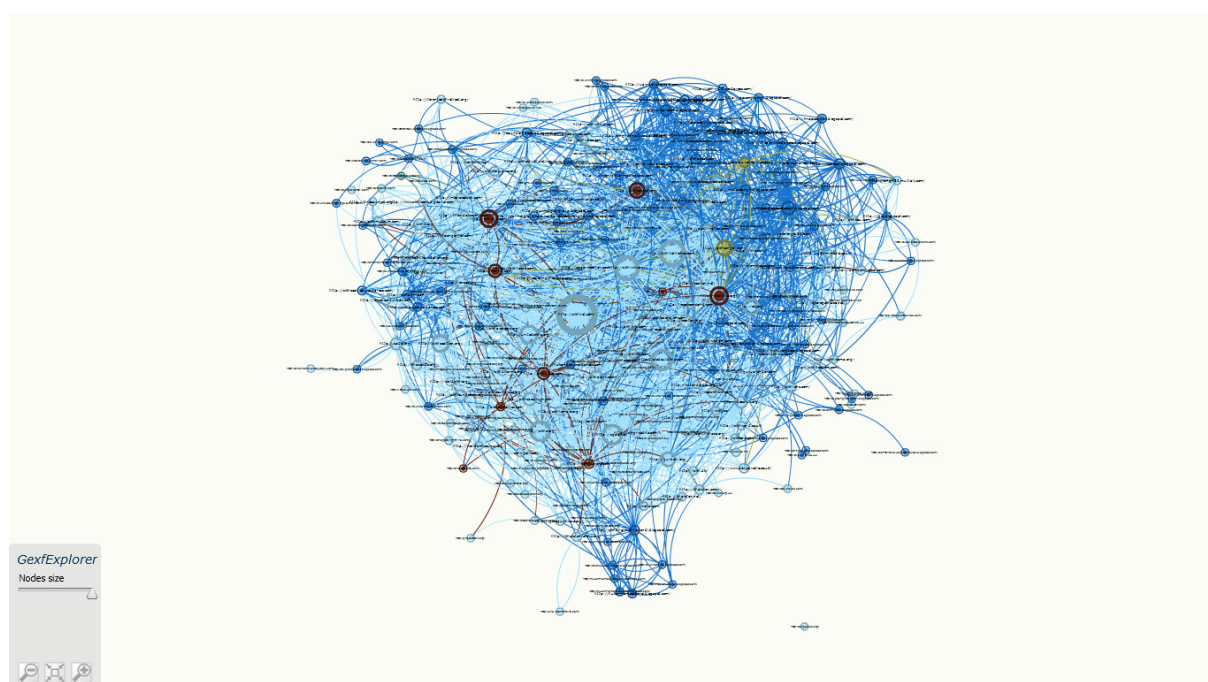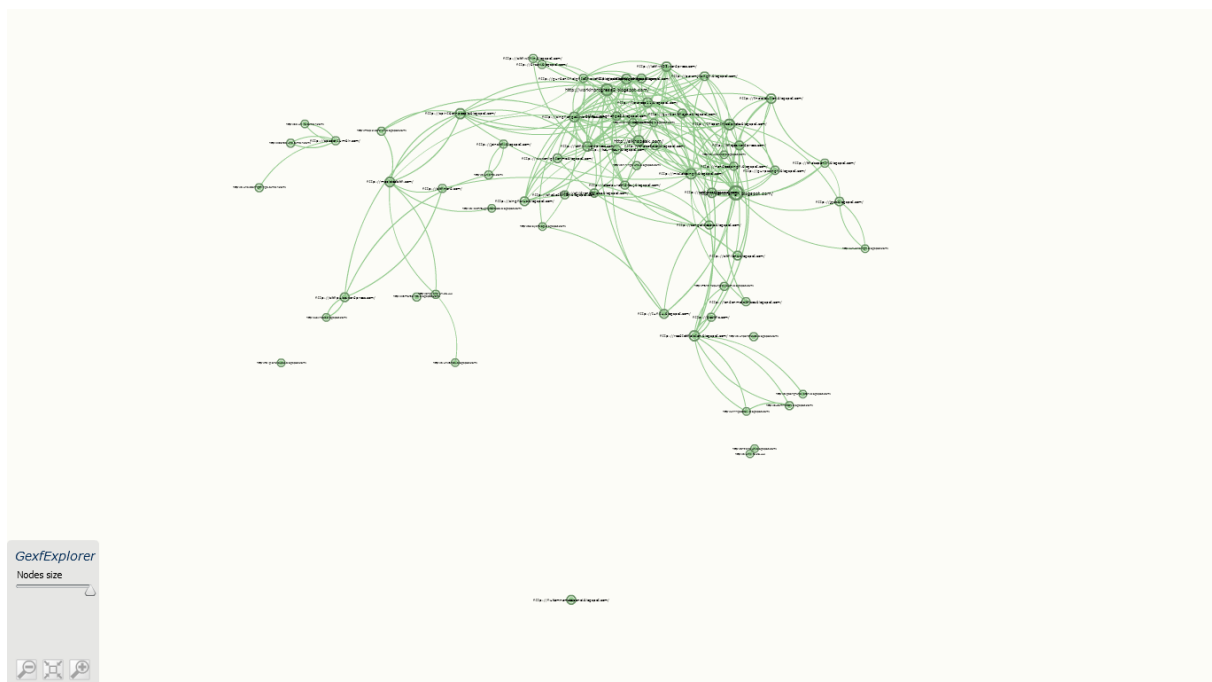19. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3&section=27&value=blog

EXTERNAL ATTRACTING AUTHORITIES

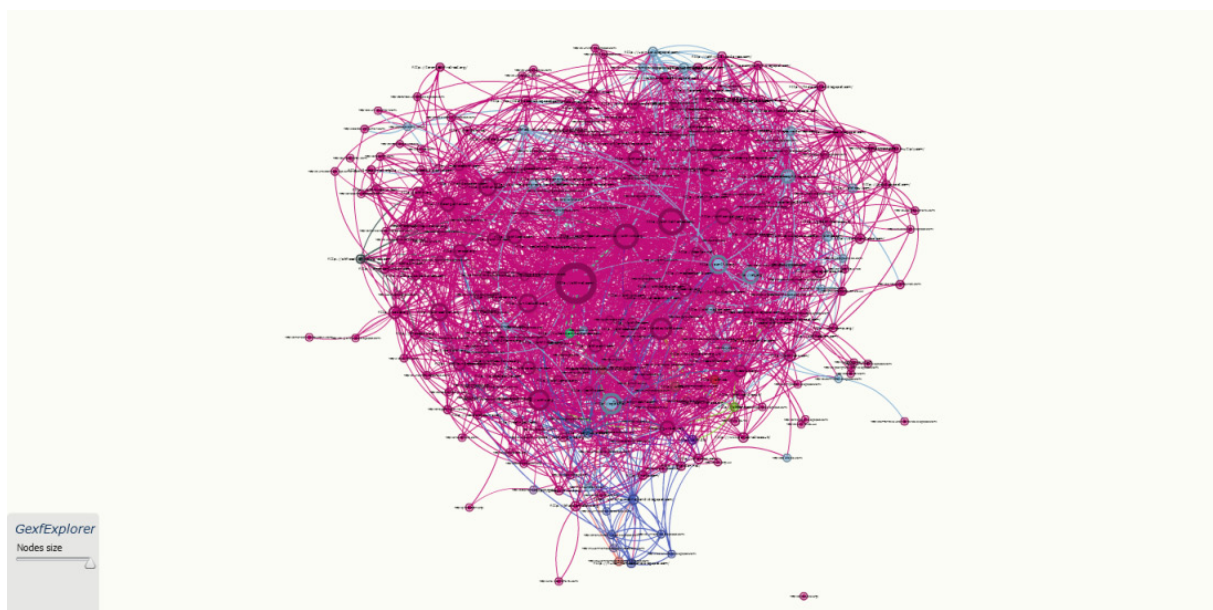**Nodes *outside* blog
that *are cited by* the most nodes *in blog***

Node name	Inbound edges FROM blog
http://sikhnet.com/ (site)	63
http://sikhitothemax.com/ (site)	45
http://sikhiwiki.org/ (site)	41
http://panthic.org/ (news group)	27
http://allaboutsikhs.com/ (site)	25
http://sgpc.net/ (site)	21
http://sikhchic.com/ (news group)	19
http://sikhsangat.com/ (forum site)	19
http://akj.org/ (site)	18
http://sikhsangat.org/ (news group)	18

Several inferences can be made based on the above blog activity - all of which are applied to the greater Sikh corpus below. The majority of individual actors on the web for example do not present themselves in a particularly formal/official capacity. This is due to the fact that most web linkages focus primarily on religion, community and culture; conceptions of diasporic unity that are fairly fluid and open to expansion. This is exacerbated by the sheer diversity of web based actors within the corpus. Distribution statistics for example indicate that groups account for some 34% of corpus actors, with organizations accounting for another 31% and individual bloggers another 23%[20]. The above percentiles indicate that not one type of actor dominates the corpus. As opposed to being anchored by one particular actor or information medium (for example media organizations that present only community based news stories), Sikh virtual platforms are diverse and promote open exchange.

Contrary to news media outlets, Sikh networks follow a far more reflective, personalized and interactive exchange. This is especially the case for blogs, which characteristically vie for legitimacy vis-a-vis key authority sites. As opposed to necessity, diaspora populations network based on personal gratification and interest. As previously mentioned, Sikh host-homeland linkages are largely rooted in voluntary economic migration. Grievances, therefore, while often linked to contemporary violence (the events of 1984), have not come to dominate Sikh narratives in either a physical or virtual sense. Hence, with a lack of impetus behind the majority of calls for statehood, the web serves as a complimentary platform; effectively propelling transnational network linkages forward.

20. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=4&section=27

In addition, we also note the importance of language with respect to the overall applicability of virtual networks. **As visible in the graphical representation below, an astounding 85% of Sikh sites (246 out of 290 nodes) are presented unilingually in English**[21].

Such linguistic simplicity can be explained in a multitude of ways. First and foremost, we must recognize the linguistic capabilities of the majority of diaspora populations (particularly youth generations). With migration dating back to the 1960s, Punjabi (the native language of the Sikhs) continues to be largely transmitted through family, friends and religious institutions. English (among other official languages) remains the only institutionalized language for the majority of the diaspora. If, moreover, one intends to gain fluency beyond conversational Punjabi, then efforts must be made to engage in community activities in a more official capacity. Most commonly this entails attending the Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) which often provides Punjabi language lessons to the public. Physical ground realities therefore easily weave language to religious, community and cultural based institutions.

This is not to say that Punjabi does not influence virtual platforms, indeed it does - however for only a specific set of followers. The majority of online actors intentionally look to widen the scope of their audience in a quest for relevancy, applicability and readership. With an inbound density of 2.2% and an outbound density of 2.9%, English language sites are 'in deficit'[22]. This

deficit, although minute is attributed to the external links made with bilingual sites, namely those presented in Punjabi/English. English serves to unite and enhance readership particularly amongst youth populations. These individuals represent the future of the diaspora and hence are integral in the propagation of both virtual and physical networks beyond present community leaders.

For some, Punjabi can at first glance appear to be intimidating, if not off-putting. Many in the diaspora grapple with issues surrounding hybrid identity and belonging. Hence, unilingual presentation (beyond English) may in actuality serve as a barrier of inclusion and exclusion for members. Based on skill levels moreover, through linguistic commonality, Punjabi sites may even offer an implicit level of secrecy between members who have the capabilities to engage in online exchanges. Although networks may lack expansive linkages, virtual exchanges stand to be comparatively deep rooted. We note this below in the continuity of authority Punjabi/English sites both within and beyond the subgraph isolation[23]. With an inbound density of 3.9% and an outbound density of 2.1%, Punjabi/English sites are 'in profit'[24]. Punjabi in this regard acts as a barrier of exclusivity, and is treated as specialized commodity in online exchanges.

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21. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=7&section=27

22. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=7&section=27&value=english

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23. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=7&section=27&value=punjabi%252Fenglish

24. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=7&section=27&value=punjabi%252Fenglish

SUBGRAPH AUTHORITIES

Nodes *inside* punjabi/english
that *are cited by* the most nodes *in punjabi/english*

Node name	Inbound edges FROM punjabi/english
http://panthic.org/	6
http://sgpc.net/	4
http://manvirsingh.blogspot.com/	4
http://akj.org/	3
http://puneetkaur.blogspot.com/	3
http://gurmatgiangroup.wordpress.com/	3
http://gurmatgiangroup.com/	2
http://gurmatgiangroup.blogspot.com/	2
http://sikhsoul.com/	2
http://sikhee.com/	2

REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORITIES

Nodes *inside* punjabi/english
that *are cited by* the most nodes *in other language*

Node name	Inbound edges FROM other language
http://sgpc.net/	63
http://panthic.org/	51
http://akj.org/	42
http://manvirsingh.blogspot.com/	28
http://sikhactivist.net/	11
http://sikhee.com/	11
http://upinder.blogspot.com/	8
http://sikhwisdom.com/	8
http://puneetkaur.blogspot.com/	8
http://khojee.wordpress.com/	7
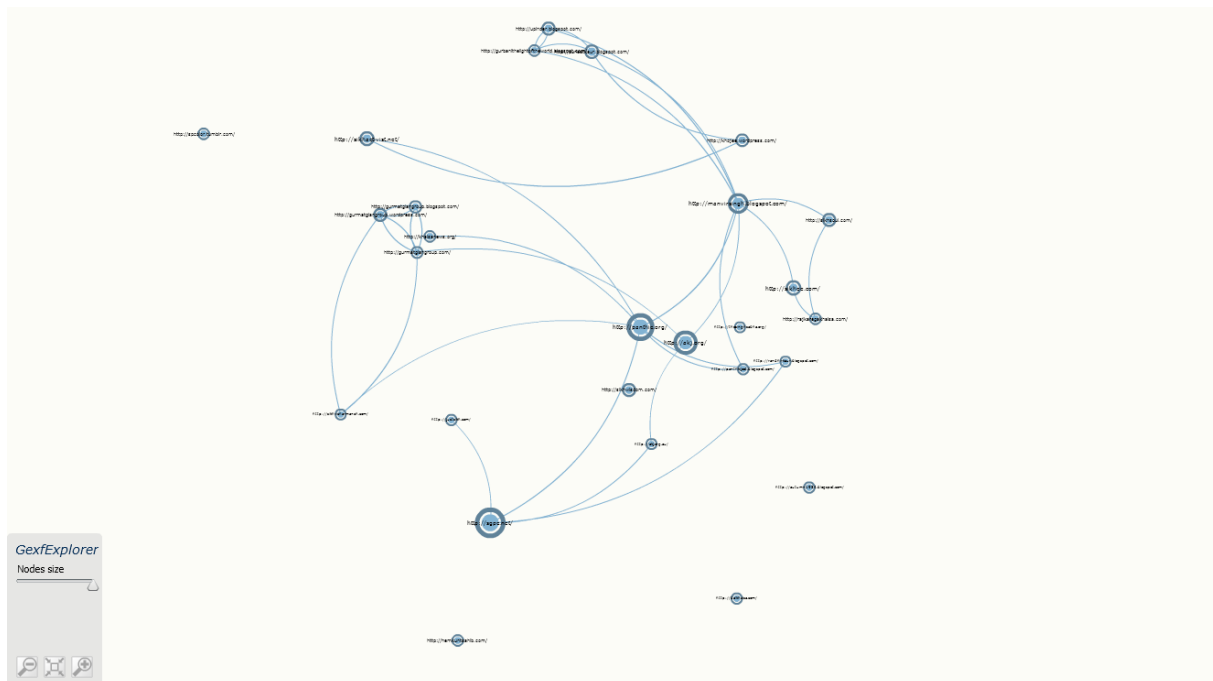
Virtual and Physical Network Linkages

Virtual platforms serve as an avenue through which the Sikh diaspora propels host-homeland linkages. Beyond expansion, networks often focus on ensuring community relevance and applicability with respect to contemporary populations (effectively the community leaders of tomorrow). Exchanges often focus on community culture, which unavoidably carry religious undertones. However, such sentiments have limitations, and transnational diaspora networks by and large maintain themselves independent of orthodox religious prescriptions. We note this in the extensive personal blogging that occurs within Sikh virtual platforms. Following a personalized approach, the vast majority of blogs focus on internal community issues; a trend which we note in the following statistical distribution tables[25].

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25. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=3&section=27&value=blog

blog | Distribution of activity (primary cause)

Distribution of activity (primary cause) in the corpus

blog | Distribution of secondary cause

Distribution of secondary cause in the corpus
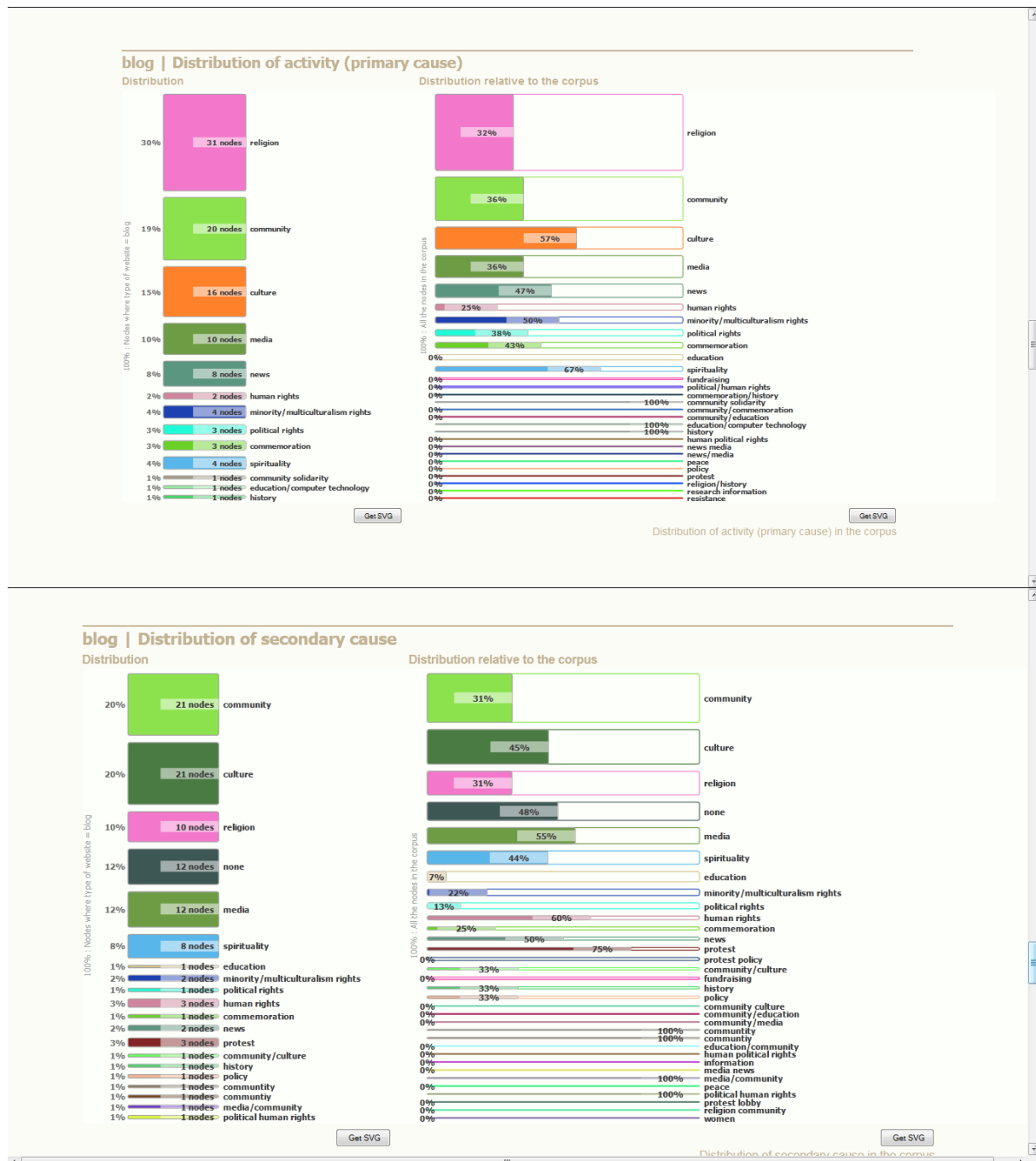
Recognizing the contemporary history of the greater diaspora, blogs are characteristically embedded with discussions related to domestic issues such as religious freedoms, politics surrounding turban wearing, and minority rights. Hence, with emphasis on collective comradery, online sentiments remain quite dense; and with the intent of appearing relatable, place much importance on presenting salient issues of the day.

This is sometimes provoked through the commemoration of historical grievances, which for the Sikhs most commonly focuses on the 1984 attacks on the Golden Temple. Contentious histories often provide the impetus for increased community engagement. Jumping generational boundaries, for the Sikhs, Operation Blue Star serves as a source of collective unity. Indeed, how grievances are commemorated and the impacts they have physically, can vary and even divide diaspora networks. Debates surrounding the events of 1984 and the subsequent calls for justice continue to flood virtual platforms. Attached protests and vigils moreover continue to be organized online, highlighting the interconnected nature of physical and virtual Sikh networks. This however

should not denounce the symbolic importance of Operation Blue Star within the community. As, over 25 years later, the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple still remains an intrinsic part of the Sikh identity. Such passions cannot be subsided especially when considering the stable conditions of past Sikh migration. This differs significantly to conflict based diaspora communities who often migrate under chaotic conditions. The Sikhs are without substantial conflict, moreover on-going disputes largely focus on both the injustices and reconciliation processes following the events of Operation Blue Star. The ideals surrounding such commemoration and subsequent activism vary, especially within virtual platforms - a trend which has come to divide community members.

Separate from calls for reconciliation for example, we note a small network within the community who continue to advocate for the state of Khalistan in Punjab, India. Beyond commemoration, web based calls for Khalistan commonly link religion to human/political rights based activities. For the masses, orthodox prescriptions do not provide the necessary solution to the past grievances associated with 1984. The majority of diaspora members do not regard theocratic governance as a means to rectify past grievances. Both physically and virtually however, orthodox calls for statehood continue, often from specialized pockets within the diaspora. From the corpus, we note such realities through the level of proactive activism in human rights and political rights based networks. Not one human rights based site (8 nodes in total) is registered to Indian servers[26]. Only one political rights based site is officially registered in Amritsar (Punjab) India, with another 50% registered to the US[27].

As mentioned prior, when considering Sikh grievance narratives, a distinction must be made between those who support their community and those vying for the creation of *panthic* Khalistan. Extremists support the latter, creating much friction between orthodox Sikhs and the greater Punjabi Sikh diaspora[28]. Such a lack of

unity has also raised ethical questions in terms of commemoration practices. This was most notable in June of 2001, when a worldwide coalition of Sikh organizations (from the diaspora) looked to establish a virtual transnational campaign to commemorate the death of key martyr's from Operation Blue Star 29. The commemoration was reluctantly sponsored by orthodox organizations (such as the Akal Takhat, Damdami Taksal and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, SGPC)[30]. All of these orthodox organizations publicly condemned the commemoration, commenting that a symbolic funeral would in actuality disrespect the iconic martyrs[31]. Such ethical disputes highlight the tension between regulatory and normative debates surrounding host and homeland populations. Even the term 'Sikh' and what it is meant to encompass (religiously and linguistically) has divided respective group members[32]. Younger generations often shy away from normative justifications for group engagement. Most members conisder faith as a divisive unit of group grievance, where religious conviction separates orthodox Khalistan from the greater Punjabi Sikh narrative. Beyond debates of religiosity, faith provides a loose framework through which community networks have had the opportunity to thrive in. At the discretion of the ever-evolving diaspora, what such expansion entails however, will continue to expand over time.

Conclusion

Between opportunities and motivations, the Sikh diaspora continues to maintain non-static virtual platforms of engagement. The majority of Sikhs do in fact support the development and maintenance of a robust transnational community. However, this does not necessarily weave itself into ideals of statehood and more importantly Khalistan. Motivations surrounding physical and virtual platforms are not primarily focused on the political insecurities and grievances of the past. As indicated by key corpus authorities, the parameters of online engagement are largely set by religious, community and cultural inter-linkages.

26. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27&value=human%2Brights

27. http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=72&map=59&nodeattribute=5&section=27&value=political%2Brights

28. Nayar, K.E. 2004. *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver*. University of Toronto Press, Canada, 183.

29. Axel, B.K. 2008. 'Digital Figurings of the Unimaginable: Visual Media, Death, and Formations of the Sikh Diaspora'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34:7, 1151.

30. Axel 2008: 1151 The SGPC acts as a 'Sikh Parliament' and facilitates much of the Sikh nationalist consciousness.

31. Axel 2008: 1151

32. Axel 2008: 1151

A lack of monopolistic control over respective group narratives has meant that by and large, diaspora members have created their own interpretations of collective history and current affairs. This paper investigated the utility of the web in linking and expanding Sikh networks, and offers the following conclusions.

For the majority of the Sikh diaspora, the events of 1984 represented a period of rediscovery of homeland origins. As a reactionary transnational group, respective members appear to engage in virtual activities at their discretion. Put differently, as an economic based migrant community, the Sikh diaspora does not carry motivations rooted in conflict and self-preservation. As such, the web compliments the physical realities of the diaspora, which in host countries, has continued to evolve for decades. As a tool of networking and in the context of domestic host country politics, virtual platforms allow for the discussion of community issues. Collectively, we have observed how the Sikh diaspora obtains relevancy and readership online. Tactics of engagement focus on emotional understanding, normative applicability and personal relatability. We note this in the emphasis on core unifiers such as religion. Moreover, through the use of blogs, members of the diaspora extend a sense of comfort and understanding to one another. Finally, with the majority of online interaction presented in English, trivial barriers that obstruct engagement sparingly exist. Transcending borders, the Sikh case highlights how beyond unresolved conflict, diaspora communities increasingly rely on the web to establish and maintain networked linkages of dialogue.

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