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**e-Diasporas Atlas**

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## Plateforme e-Diasporas

<http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section&section=26>

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the Tamil diaspora in the context of virtual networks. Contemporary linkages stem from decades of civil unrest within Sri Lanka. The Tamil community has found much unity in perceived injustices and marginalization following a violent mass exodus during the 1980s. Quests for political validation and statehood in North East Sri Lanka have transferred to virtual platforms. Subsequent networks are both sophisticated and dynamic - proactively transcending borders, propelling transnational linkages forward. Between the virtual and physical, this paper investigates how respective communities network and expand online. This includes mapping online activities, which characteristically focus on current affairs and ground realities. Indeed, the web provides a platform of engagement, which in a quest for legitimacy has expanded the networked opportunities available for the greater Tamil diaspora.

## Keywords

diaspora, web, Internet, Tamils, Sri Lanka

## Mots-clefs

diaspora, web, Internet, Tamouls, Sri Lanka

The Tamil diaspora has gained considerable attention through their ability to network, discuss and debate contentious issues both inside and outside of their community. Most recently, in response to mass allegations of human rights violations (at the hands of Sri Lankan governing authorities) 2009 witnessed numerous attempts to mobilize on an impressive transnational scale. Protests and demonstrations were largely coordinated online, snowballing into a transnational community network. The BBC reported that during this time roadways in London, UK were intentionally blocked by protestors<sup>1</sup>. The use of human chains was furthered, into an unprecedented action – on May 10 2009 the Gardiner Expressway, a major highway in downtown Toronto, Canada was closed down due to demonstrators, which included children in strollers<sup>2</sup>. Many such protests and demonstrations were recorded and posted on various websites such as YouTube<sup>3</sup>.

Fast forward to today, and the majority of sentiments within the greater Tamil community remain focused on political rights, freedoms and the homeland. As marginalized ‘underdogs’, community sentiments often serve to propel and unite Tamil expats, migrants and an increasingly active diaspora youth population. Moreover, with a hierarchy of purpose (that being political and human rights violations), historical undertones are well networked and woven into the greater Tamil community. This is often propagated vis-a-vis news and media outlets which increasingly lack borders; motivating transnational networked linkages between host and homeland communities. How does this translate on the world wide web (here after web)? Between the virtual and the physical, this paper assesses the impact of the web, a non-static entity, in propelling the greater Tamil diaspora community forward (albeit in multiple directions). As a platform that promotes the mass exchange of ideas and beliefs, this paper considers the web in the context of community streamlining and engagement opportunities.

Online activity can take many forms. As in the case of the Tamil diaspora for example, exchanges of information often take place on news update platforms. This differs considerably from that of personal blogging which is often far more personal, reflective and expressive. For the purposes of this paper, the nature of websites and subsequent online activity are investigated in an attempt to uncover the virtual trends of the Tamil diaspora. This includes questioning the ‘flow’ between respective websites, along with uncovering the dominant trends of online activity.

## Tamil Baseline Grievances - Physical Platforms

Decades of mass rioting and violence have rooted the identity of many Sri Lankan Tamils in the quest for political validation and statehood. Calls for the independent state of ‘Tamil Eelam’ in North East Sri Lanka are evident in the level of community consciousness within respective diaspora networks. Grievances felt by host and homeland Tamil populations focus on the perceived imbalance of political rights, representation and power within the country. From the 1940s onward, prior to Sri Lankan independence (1948), Tamil newspapers echoed community sentiments of marginalization<sup>4</sup>. In response to controversial news stories, Tamil newspapers have periodically been blackened out and censored by governing authorities. As a result of decades of censorship in Sri Lanka, interest groups within the community continuously look to improve and expand on networking techniques.

Although not a focus of this paper, it is important to briefly consider the violent history of the country and its people. Until a temporary ceasefire in February of 2002, the Sri Lankan civil war spanned some 18 years - leaving hundreds of thousands dead<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, it was only in 2009, with the death of LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) leader Velupillai Prabhakaran that the rebel organization laid down their arms. Group grievances have been contrived for decades to revolve around human rights violations against innocent Tamil civilians and

1. “Tamil Demonstrators Block Streets – April 20 2009” <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8007858.stm>>

2. “Toronto Protestors End Blockade on Major Toronto Highway – May 11 2009” <<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/toronto/story/2009/05/10/toronto-tamilprotest.html>>

3. “March of the Tamil Tigers Protest – May 10 2009” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pM0RKcsouKY>>

4. Ranganathan, M. 2009. ‘Understanding Eelam through the Diaspora’s online engagement’. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23:5, 713.

5. Whitaker, M. 2004. ‘Tamilnet.com: Some Reflections on Popular Anthropology, Nationalism, and the Internet’. *Anthropological Quarterly* 77:3, 476.

the corrupt activities of the Sri Lankan army<sup>6</sup>. The above have spearheaded narratives of 'victimhood' which have in reality bound the community together. Beyond the LTTE, the legacy of the 1983 civil war is found in the rooted narratives of conflict an increasingly heated diaspora community. Considering that only 30% of homes in Sri Lanka have access to the web, the majority of online traffic emerges from individuals in host countries<sup>7</sup>. With links both inside and outside of the diaspora, the Tamil virtual community continues to establish savvy networks (increasingly on a transnational scale). As such, to better understand the role of the web in greater transnational linkages, through corpus mapping of websites this paper investigates baseline virtual platforms of Tamil networks.

## Methodology and Classification

Mapping of the e-diaspora corpus was created by various technological tools and devices (navi-crawler, gephi, whois) - all of which are explained in detail in the methodology portion of the atlas. The Tamil corpus (consisting of 243 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. Alternatively, personal blogs by individuals may not carry as concrete cemented objectives. 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 for the Tamil 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.

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. Through both time (migration history) and space (geographic distance) non-English based actors may believe themselves to be 'closer' to respective grievances through self-defined proximity to community narratives. Hence, as opposed to a filtration process (as described above), language can be used to implicitly market and advertise particular dialogue to specific community members.

Country & Location - admittingly the classification for location is relatively loose largely due to the complexity of online IP geographic identification. A large amount (39%) of websites and actors remain undeclared and even use proxy hosts to avoid detection<sup>8</sup>. Blogs unless self-defined by the individual or group are untraceable and therefore can carry many implications in terms of who they attract geographically.

Through visual and statistical representation of the virtual Tamil community, the e-diaspora atlas provides the necessary information to question how the web can serve to facilitate transnational linkages. Both inside and outside of respective communities, virtual platforms allow for a non-static flow of interaction to occur based on interest and not necessity. As such, this paper questions the nature of what is being discussed and presented online and the implications of community debates within the greater Tamil discourse.

6. Tekwani, S. 2003. 'The Tamil diaspora, Tamil militancy, and the Internet'. in *Asia.com: Asia Encounters the Internet*. Ho, K. C., Kluver, R. and Yang C (1st ed). Routledge, 187.

7. 183

8. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribut e&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=8&section=26>

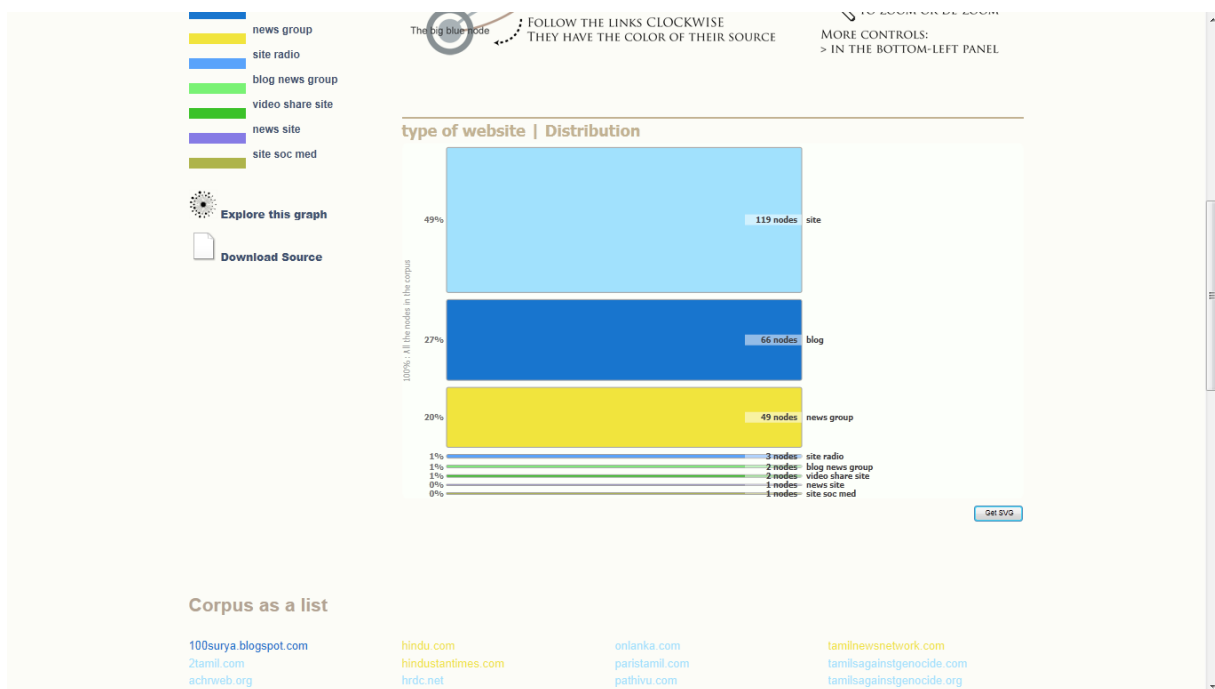
## Virtual Platforms: Tamil e-diaspora Atlas

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the greater Tamil diaspora continues to encourage networked waves of transnational engagement. Manifested both virtually and physically, linkages largely focus on debates surrounding quests for statehood and human rights violations. Hence, for the Tamil diaspora, the web often serves as a strategic resource for effective streamlining of contentious community affairs. For a large contingent of members, community affairs remain cemented in the past migration (a conflict driven exodus) of the 1980s as well as the accompanying struggles of host country living. Host-homeland links therefore provide a framework

for web based engagement. It is in this respect, that we consider the e-diaspora atlas for the virtual Tamil community.

Upon initial analysis it is evident that for a large contingent of the Tamil diaspora, the web serves as an integral platform for engagement within homeland affairs. What 'engagement' constitutes, admittedly can differ considerably. However, as a basis, virtual platforms are dynamic, with online activity largely characterized by news and media outlets. Consider that some 20% of web-sites within the corpus are defined as news group websites<sup>9</sup>.

9. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3&section=26>

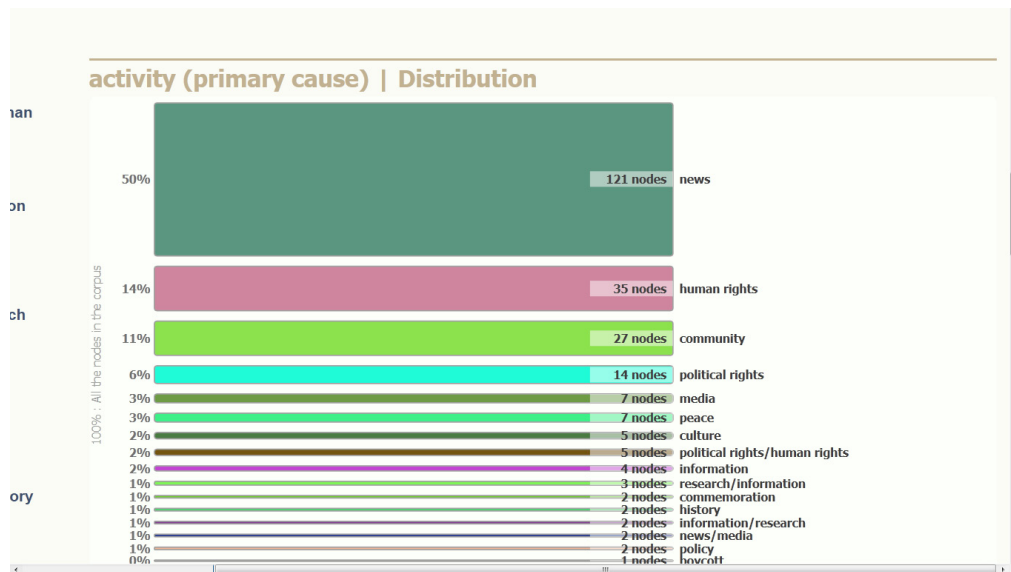


As a result, it comes as no surprise that online activities are primarily focused on host-homeland news exchanges. Quite significantly, some 50% of primary online activity is categorized under news, dominating over community (11%), culture (2%) and human rights (14%) based activities<sup>10</sup>.

10. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5&section=26>

Understanding and accounting for such a significant percentage of news related activity within the corpus is a focus of the following analysis. To be clear however, online activities are interwoven with community and human rights, often linking in with current news affairs.



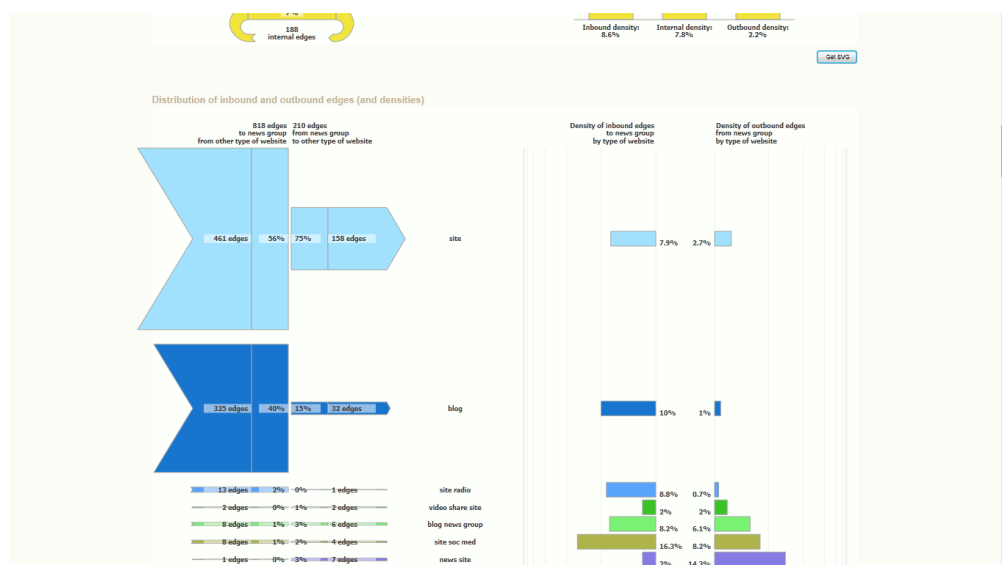


The statistics below are significant as they indicate that, at the very least much like newspapers and television programming in the past. The web has become a necessary staple for the propagation of contemporary networks. Interactive in its exchange of information (compared to that of newspapers and television), the opportunities to mobilize and network online are well established and continue to progress. The motivations however, are often dependant on the physical realities of host-homeland ground affairs. The backdrop of the greater Tamil community continues to be cloudy, with remnants of the 1983 civil war still entrenched in the minds of many.

Through analysis of corpus statistics, it is evident that news group websites serve as the online

anchor for transnational Tamil affairs. We can note this in the asymmetrical inbound and outbound links between various website categories. News group websites are considered to be «in profit», as based on the corpus the density of inbound edges are comparatively higher than that of outbound edges. For example, the density of inbound edges to news groups from blogs is valued at 10%<sup>11</sup>. This is considerably higher than that of outbound news group websites toward blogs (1%). As visible in the chart below, similar ‘in profit’ trends exist for numerous website classifications beyond blogs.

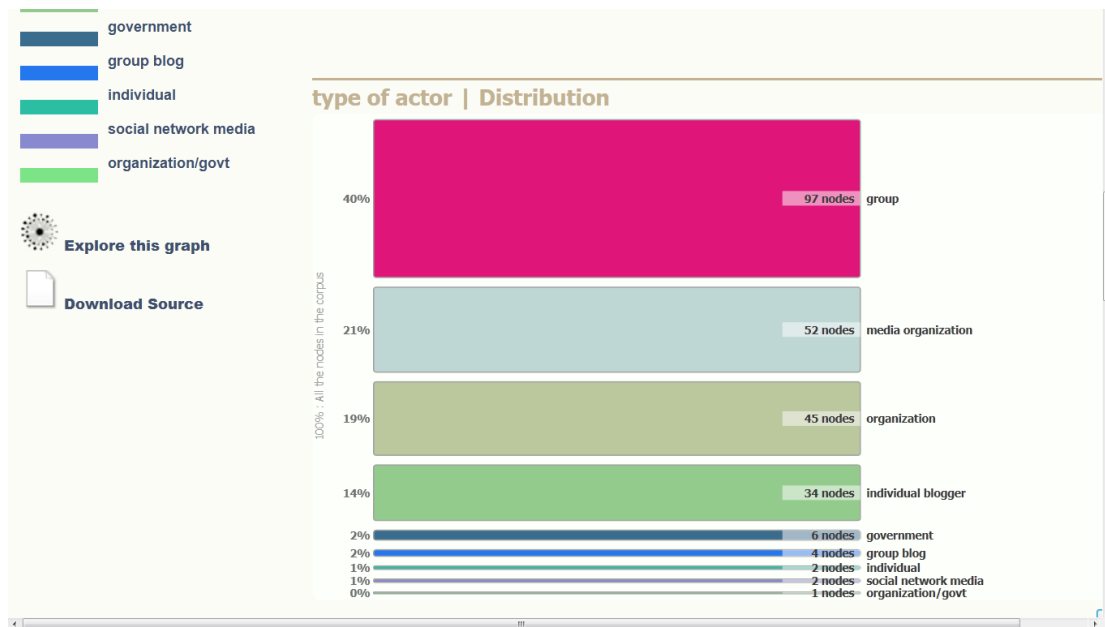
11. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3&section=26&value=news%2Bgroup>



Much of the strength of virtual news groups stems from the level of organization of respective actors. Some 21% of online actors are classified as media organizations; greater than that of both

self-defined organizations (19%) and individual bloggers (14%)<sup>12</sup>.

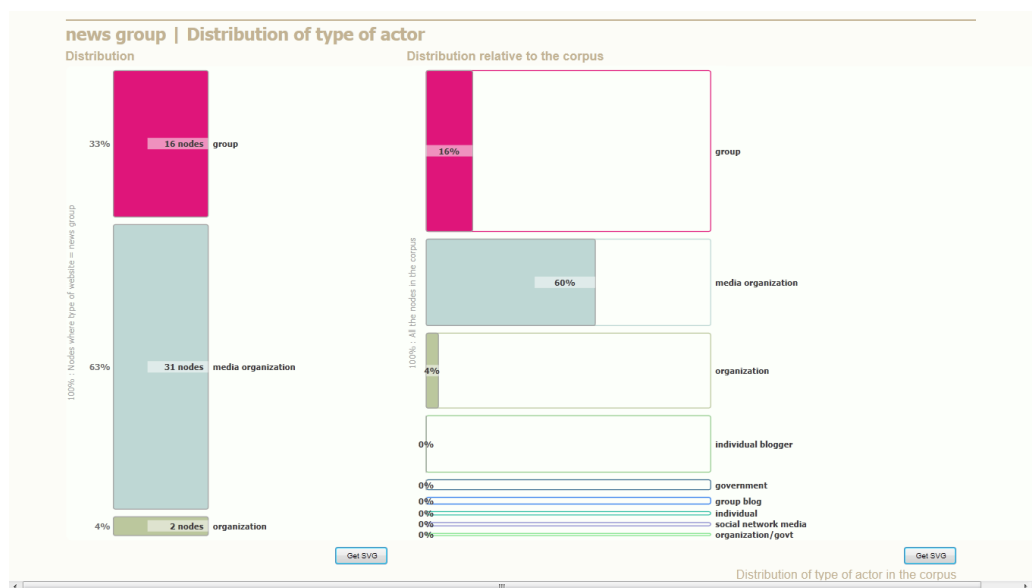
12. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=4&section=26>



This significance is also reaffirmed by distribution values. Statistical representation indicates for example that 60% of news group nodes are distributed within media organizations (with an

overall distribution value of 63% relative to the entire corpus)<sup>13</sup>.

13. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3&section=26&value=news%2Bgroup>





The descending order of sites, blogs and media organizations between both respective distribution scales highlights the importance and relevance of news media within Tamil virtual platforms. With a clear directed vision to inform those both inside and outside of the diaspora, media organizations are imperative in the propagation of (sometimes contentious) political affairs, community activities and host-homeland relations. As progressive actors, Tamil media organizations have an expansionary influence on virtual platforms. This is visible through the various hubs and authorities within the corpus that

are often multi-disciplinary in nature, effectively weaving themselves into complementary clusters. This is particularly evident upon further analysis of influential authorities such as *tamilnet.com* and *dailymirror.lk*; prominent nodes within the corpus. Statistics indicate that within news group websites, the above nodes are the top two sub-graph authorities (16 inbound edges from news groups)<sup>14</sup>.

14. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3&section=26&cvalue=news%2Bgroup>

### Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside news group that are cited by the most nodes in news group

Node name	Inbound edges FROM news group
<a href="http://tamilnet.com/">http://tamilnet.com/</a>	16
<a href="http://dailymirror.lk/">http://dailymirror.lk/</a>	16
<a href="http://srilankaguardian.org/">http://srilankaguardian.org/</a>	12
<a href="http://thehindu.com/">http://thehindu.com/</a>	11
<a href="http://nation.lk/">http://nation.lk/</a>	9
<a href="http://groundviews.org/">http://groundviews.org/</a>	8
<a href="http://hindustantimes.com/">http://hindustantimes.com/</a>	8
<a href="http://lankasrinews.com/">http://lankasrinews.com/</a>	8
<a href="http://tamilwin.com/">http://tamilwin.com/</a>	8
<a href="http://hindu.com/">http://hindu.com/</a>	7

This trend continues with respect to representative authorities, that is, news group websites cited by external nodes (all other types of websites)

with 89 inbound edges for *tamilnet.com*, and 80 for *dailymirror.lk*<sup>15</sup>.

15. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3&section=26&cvalue=news%2Bgroup>

### Representative Authorities

Nodes inside news group  
that are cited by the most nodes in other type of website

Node name	Inbound edges FROM other type of website
<a href="http://tamilnet.com/">http://tamilnet.com/</a>	89
<a href="http://dailymirror.lk/">http://dailymirror.lk/</a>	80
<a href="http://srilankaguardian.org/">http://srilankaguardian.org/</a>	48
<a href="http://hindustantimes.com/">http://hindustantimes.com/</a>	42
<a href="http://hindu.com/">http://hindu.com/</a>	38
<a href="http://groundviews.org/">http://groundviews.org/</a>	37
<a href="http://lankaenews.com/">http://lankaenews.com/</a>	35
<a href="http://tamilguardian.com/">http://tamilguardian.com/</a>	34
<a href="http://colombopage.com/">http://colombopage.com/</a>	34
<a href="http://thehindu.com/">http://thehindu.com/</a>	33

Beyond website categorization, actor classification of media organizations renders similar results. *Tamilnet.com* and *dailymirror.lk* remain the top two representative authorities with 88 and 77 inbound edges from outside actors respectively

(the highest number of node citations from actors outside of media organizations)<sup>16</sup>.

16. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=4&section=26&value=media%2Borganization>

## Representative Authorities

Nodes inside media organization  
that are cited by the most nodes in other type of actor

Node name	Inbound edges FROM other type of actor
<a href="http://tamilnet.com/">http://tamilnet.com/</a>	88
<a href="http://dailymirror.lk/">http://dailymirror.lk/</a>	77
<a href="http://srilankaguardian.org/">http://srilankaguardian.org/</a>	48
<a href="http://thehindu.com/">http://thehindu.com/</a>	36
<a href="http://lankaenews.com/">http://lankaenews.com/</a>	35
<a href="http://nation.lk/">http://nation.lk/</a>	32
<a href="http://tamilguardian.com/">http://tamilguardian.com/</a>	30
<a href="http://tamilwin.com/">http://tamilwin.com/</a>	30
<a href="http://lankabusinessonline.com/">http://lankabusinessonline.com/</a>	28
<a href="http://pathivu.com/">http://pathivu.com/</a>	26

As discussed in greater detail below, Tamil virtual networks are indeed very well connected to the above principal authorities. As a gateway of dialogue, the influence of *tamilnet.com* and *dailymirror.lk* within the corpus extends beyond news and media coverage. This is visible in both the external attracting authorities and source hubs of news based activity websites. We note for example

that the top three external attracting authorities; *tamilcanadian.com*, *infolanka.com*, *dbsjeyaraj.com* (nodes outside news activity cited by news websites) are all categorized as community based activity websites<sup>17</sup>.

17. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=4&section=26&value=media%2Borganization>

## External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside media organization  
that are cited by the most nodes in media organization

Node name	Inbound edges FROM media organization
<a href="http://tamilcanadian.com/">http://tamilcanadian.com/</a> (group)	11
<a href="http://athirvu.com/">http://athirvu.com/</a> (organization)	10
<a href="http://sankathi.com/">http://sankathi.com/</a> (group)	10
<a href="http://lankasrinews.com/">http://lankasrinews.com/</a> (group)	8
<a href="http://groundviews.org/">http://groundviews.org/</a> (group)	7
<a href="http://hindustantimes.com/">http://hindustantimes.com/</a> (organization)	7
<a href="http://tubetamil.com/">http://tubetamil.com/</a> (social network media)	7
<a href="http://infolanka.com/">http://infolanka.com/</a> (group)	7
<a href="http://tamilkathir.com/">http://tamilkathir.com/</a> (group)	6
<a href="http://ilankainet.com/">http://ilankainet.com/</a> (group)	6

External source hubs (nodes outside news citing into news websites) expand into issues focusing on not only the Tamil community

(*2tamil.com*), but also political and human rights (*globalpeacesupport.com* and *nakkeran.com*)<sup>18</sup>.

18. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5&section=26&value=news>

### External Source Hubs

Nodes outside news  
that cite the most nodes in news

Node name	Outbound edges TO news
<a href="http://2tamil.com/">http://2tamil.com/</a> (community)	30
<a href="http://globalpeacesupport.com/">http://globalpeacesupport.com/</a> (political rights/human rights)	30
<a href="http://nakkeran.com/">http://nakkeran.com/</a> (political rights)	28
<a href="http://slnewsonline.net/">http://slnewsonline.net/</a> (human rights)	26
<a href="http://tamilnation.co/">http://tamilnation.co/</a> (community)	24
<a href="http://www.spur.asn.au/">http://www.spur.asn.au/</a> (peace)	23
<a href="http://tamilwritersguild.com/">http://tamilwritersguild.com/</a> (culture)	22
<a href="http://defenceanalytics.blogspot.com/">http://defenceanalytics.blogspot.com/</a> (human rights)	21
<a href="http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.com/">http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.com/</a> (political rights/human rights)	20
<a href="http://thefuturematara.blogspot.com/">http://thefuturematara.blogspot.com/</a> (media)	20

This influence extends to human rights based activities, where *Tamilnet.com* and *dailymirror.lk*

once again remain the top two external nodes to be cited.

### External Attracting Authorities

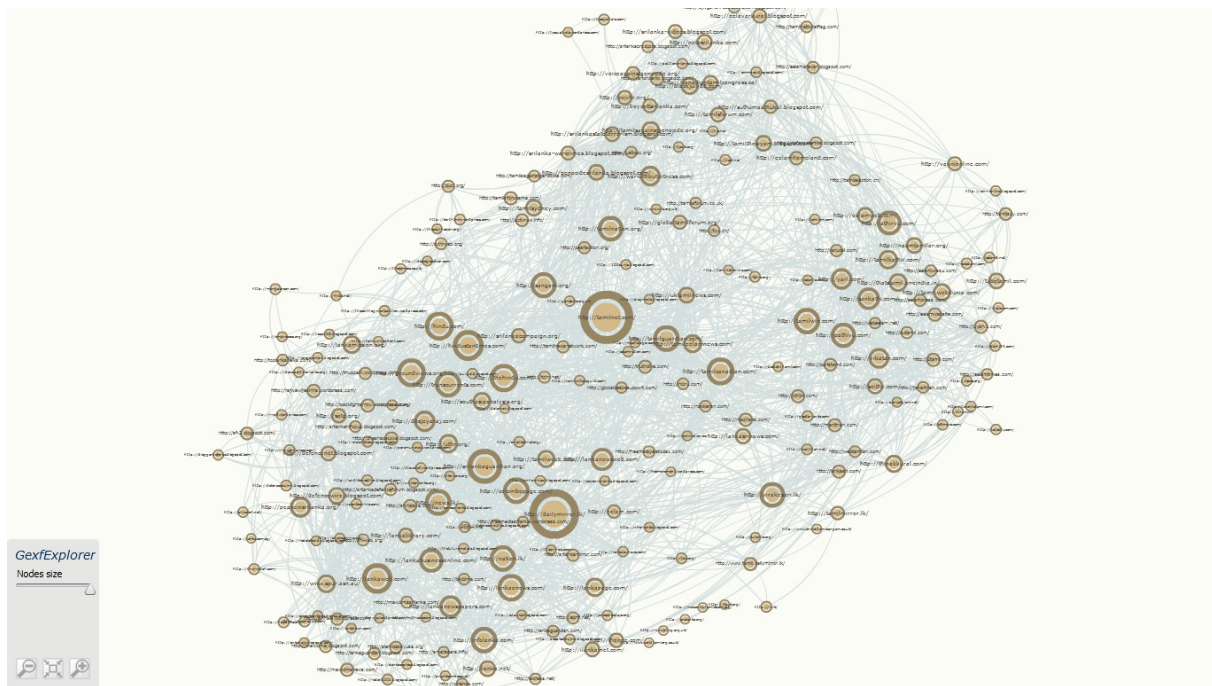
Nodes outside human rights  
that are cited by the most nodes in human rights

Node name	Inbound edges FROM human rights
<a href="http://tamilnet.com/">http://tamilnet.com/</a> (news)	20
<a href="http://dailymirror.lk/">http://dailymirror.lk/</a> (news)	12
<a href="http://hindu.com/">http://hindu.com/</a> (news)	10
<a href="http://hindustantimes.com/">http://hindustantimes.com/</a> (news)	10
<a href="http://groundviews.org/">http://groundviews.org/</a> (news)	9
<a href="http://tamilnation.org/">http://tamilnation.org/</a> (community)	9
<a href="http://transcurrents.com/">http://transcurrents.com/</a> (news)	8
<a href="http://sangam.org/">http://sangam.org/</a> (community)	8
<a href="http://srilankaguardian.org/">http://srilankaguardian.org/</a> (news)	8
<a href="http://tamilcanadian.com/">http://tamilcanadian.com/</a> (community)	7

## Accounting for Corpus Community Clusters

To account for corpus linkage structures and in the context of the selected classification, we must consider how nodes are connected to one another.

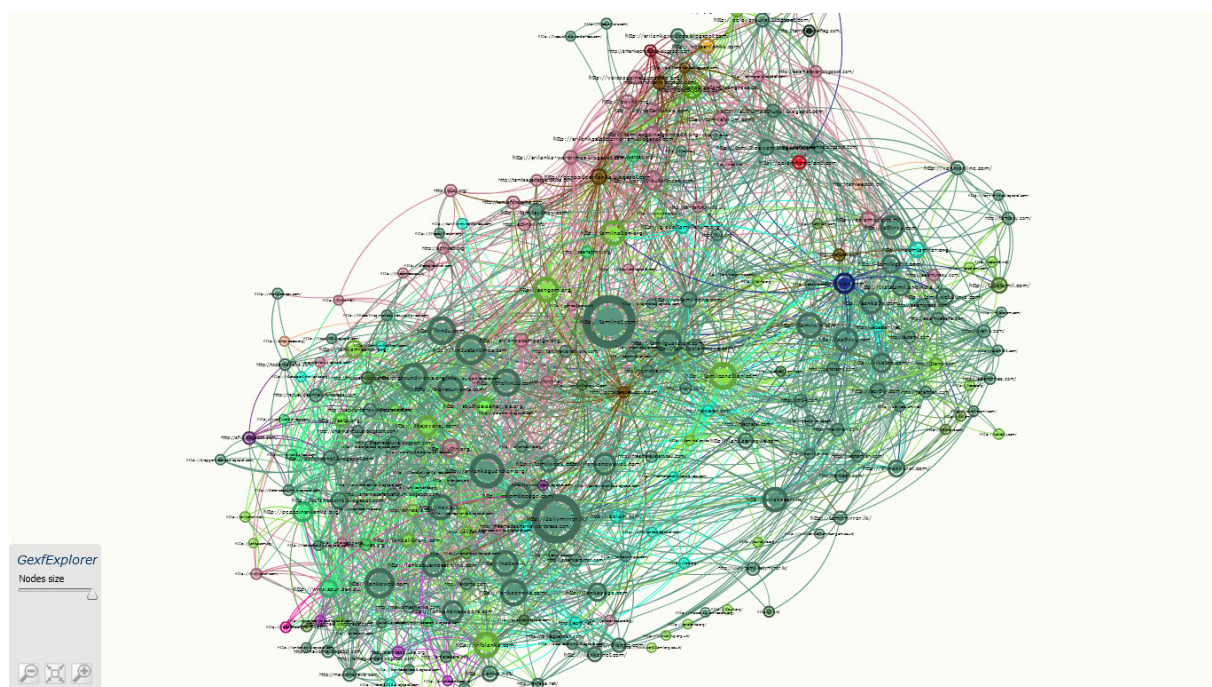
Within the corpus we can note two key community clusters (bottom left and middle right), a trend which is found on various map isolations. The following analysis investigates the nature of Tamil community clusters.



In terms of type of activity, we note the separation and network flow through key authorities *tamilnet.com* and *dailymirror.lk*<sup>19</sup>. This is a fairly vis-

ible trend, with a community on the bottom left of the corpus weaving into human rights based activity in the upper-centre of the corpus.

19. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5&section=26>

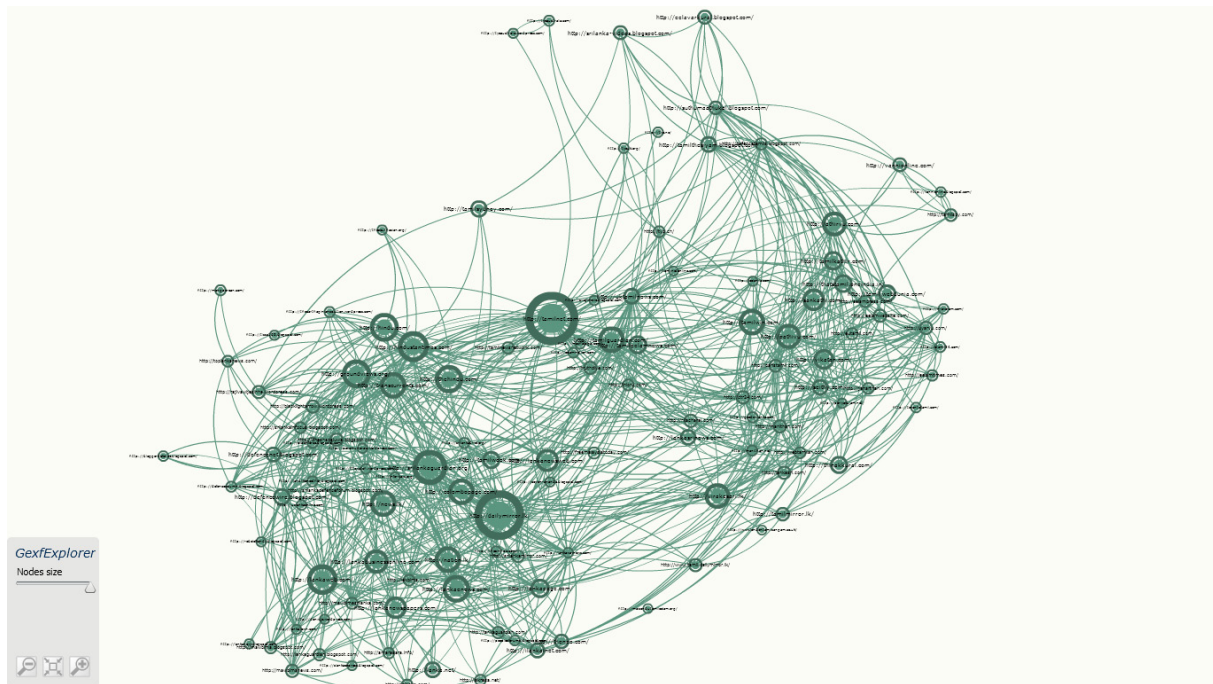


Beyond the visible communities, the importance of news based websites in the maintenance and expansion of Tamil virtual platforms is reaffirmed by the isolation below. In isolating the corpus for news, we note the level of references going through the two top authorities *tamilnet.com* and

*dailymirror.lk*. Moreover, it is visible that as a virtual 'framework', news acts as a corpus backdrop to all other activities<sup>20</sup>.

20. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5&section=26&value=news>





For instance, we can note the expansionary characteristics of news based activity when considering networked links to human rights based websites. The top two external source hubs that cite human rights nodes for are classified as news based. On a stronger scale, we can also observe

this trend through the external attracting authorities of human rights based nodes<sup>21</sup>.

21. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=5&section=26&value=human%20Rights>

### External Source Hubs

Nodes outside human rights  
that cite the most nodes in human rights

Node name	Outbound edges TO human rights
<a href="http://defencetamils.blogspot.com/">http://defencetamils.blogspot.com/</a> (news)	11
<a href="http://suthumaathukal.blogspot.com/">http://suthumaathukal.blogspot.com/</a> (news)	11
<a href="http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.com/">http://genocidesrilanka.blogspot.com/</a> (political rights/human rights)	10
<a href="http://uktamilnews.com/">http://uktamilnews.com/</a> (news)	10
<a href="http://sangam.org/">http://sangam.org/</a> (community)	10
<a href="http://tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com/">http://tamilthesiyam.blogspot.com/</a> (news)	8
<a href="http://srilankaproducts.blogspot.com/">http://srilankaproducts.blogspot.com/</a> (boycott)	8
<a href="http://srilanka-videos.blogspot.com/">http://srilanka-videos.blogspot.com/</a> (news)	8
<a href="http://petitionsrilanka.blogspot.com/">http://petitionsrilanka.blogspot.com/</a> (political rights/human rights)	8
<a href="http://globalpeacesupport.com/">http://globalpeacesupport.com/</a> (political rights/human rights)	8

## External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside human rights  
that are cited by the most nodes in human rights

Node name	Inbound edges FROM human rights
<a href="http://tamilnet.com/">http://tamilnet.com/</a> (news)	20
<a href="http://dailymirror.lk/">http://dailymirror.lk/</a> (news)	12
<a href="http://hindu.com/">http://hindu.com/</a> (news)	10
<a href="http://hindustantimes.com/">http://hindustantimes.com/</a> (news)	10
<a href="http://groundviews.org/">http://groundviews.org/</a> (news)	9
<a href="http://tamilnation.org/">http://tamilnation.org/</a> (community)	9
<a href="http://transcurrents.com/">http://transcurrents.com/</a> (news)	8
<a href="http://sangam.org/">http://sangam.org/</a> (community)	8
<a href="http://srilankaguardian.org/">http://srilankaguardian.org/</a> (news)	8
<a href="http://tamilcanadian.com/">http://tamilcanadian.com/</a> (community)	7

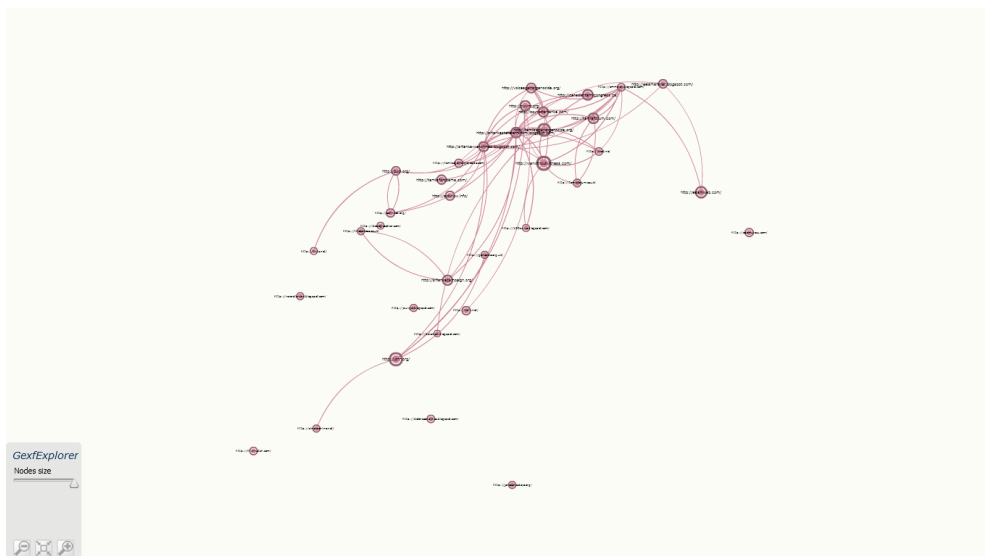
Statistics infer that subgraph authorities set the parameters of human rights based nodes within the corpus. This is confirmed by isolating the corpus by human rights based activity. With inbound edge density at 2.7% and outbound edge density

at 4.4% we note human rights edges to be slightly 'in deficit'. This is reaffirmed through visual representation of the isolated corpus, where nodes are largely linked based on internal citations.

## Subgraph Authorities

Nodes inside human rights  
that are cited by the most nodes in human rights

Node name	Inbound edges FROM human rights
<a href="http://warwithoutwitness.com/">http://warwithoutwitness.com/</a>	7
<a href="http://tamilsagainstgenocide.org/">http://tamilsagainstgenocide.org/</a>	6
<a href="http://uthr.org/">http://uthr.org/</a>	5
<a href="http://cwvhr.org/">http://cwvhr.org/</a>	4
<a href="http://canadiantamilcongress.ca/">http://canadiantamilcongress.ca/</a>	4
<a href="http://pucl.org/">http://pucl.org/</a>	4
<a href="http://tamilsforum.com/">http://tamilsforum.com/</a>	3
<a href="http://voiceagainstgenocide.org/">http://voiceagainstgenocide.org/</a>	3
<a href="http://achrweb.org/">http://achrweb.org/</a>	3
<a href="http://ncet.no/">http://ncet.no/</a>	3



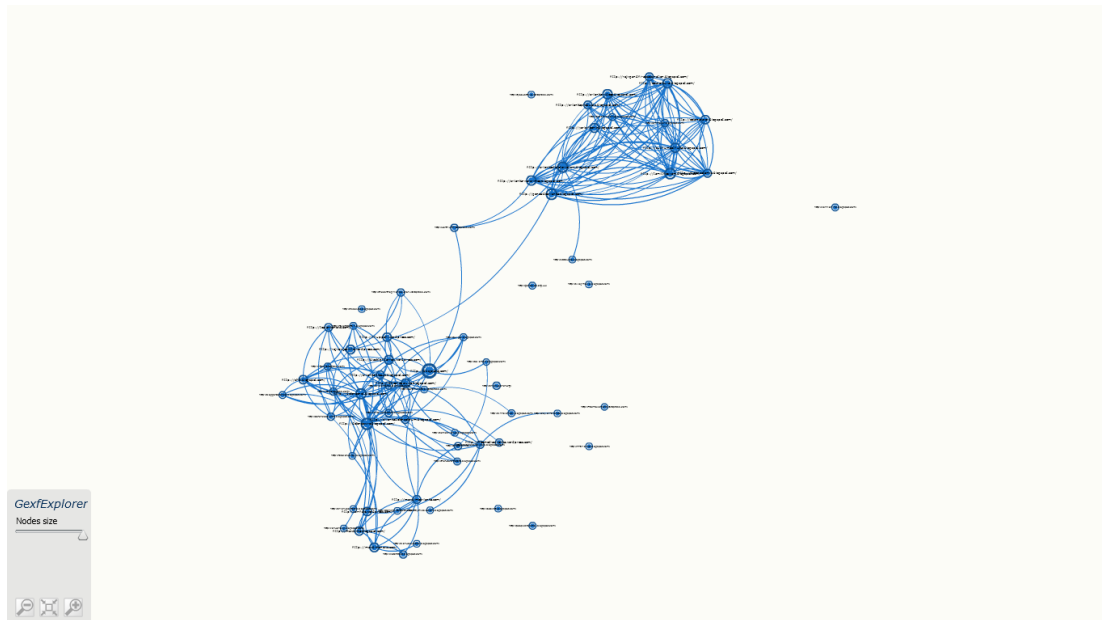




We can also note the importance of blog websites in linking the bottom left community with the top portion of the corpus. Although linked with human rights based activity, blogs are 'in deficit' with a considerable differential between inbound edge density (0.8%) and outbound edge

density (6.3%)<sup>22</sup>. We also attribute the networking of blog based communities (is visible below) to corpus bridges *genosidesrilanka.blogspot.com* focusing on political/human rights and *karthi-krm.wordpress.com* focusing on political rights.

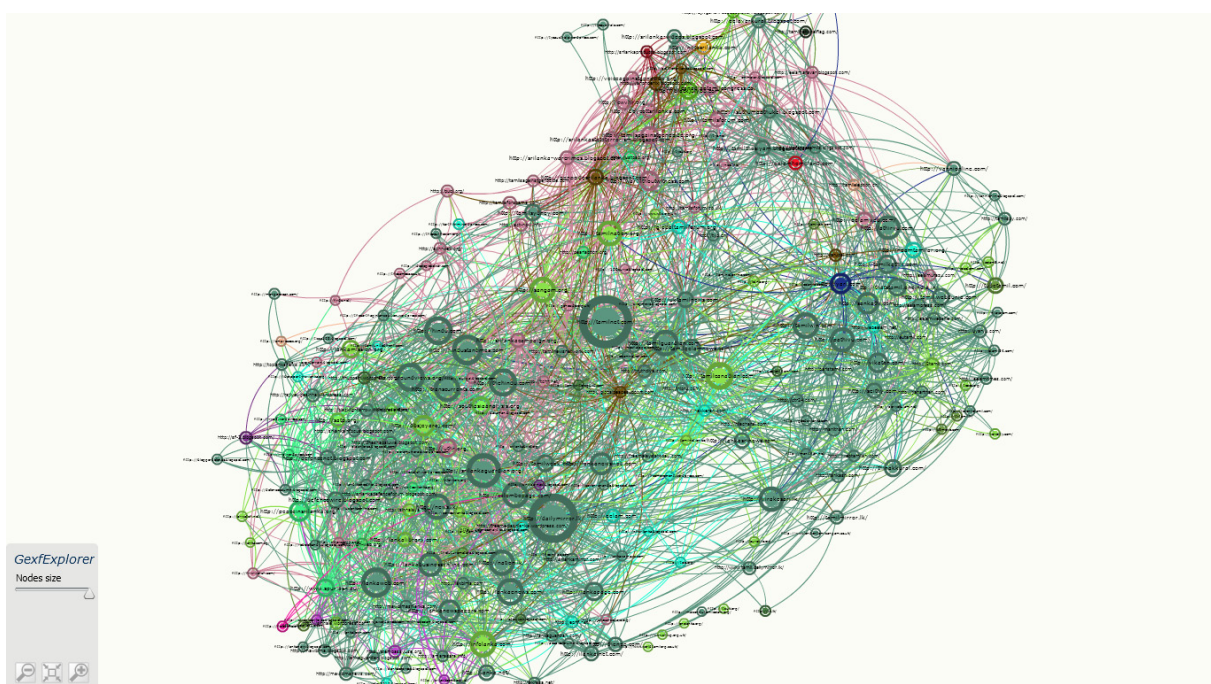
22. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=3&section=26&value=blog>

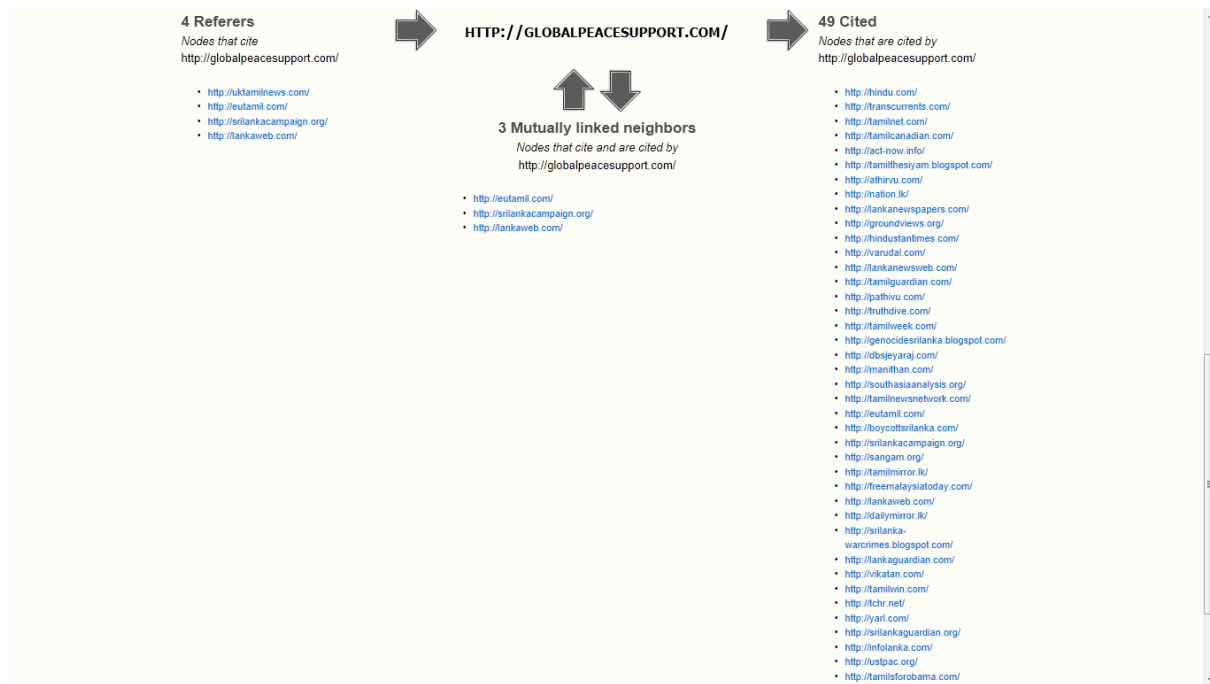


Interestingly, when categorized as a single activity, political and human rights (coloured brown) appear as the central focal point of the entire map. Although intruding, by citing 49 websites of the entire corpus (a considerable amount

compared to its four referees and three mutually linked neighbours), *globalpeacesupport.com* acts as a bridge to news and community based activity<sup>23</sup>.

23. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=71&map=58&node=235&section=26>

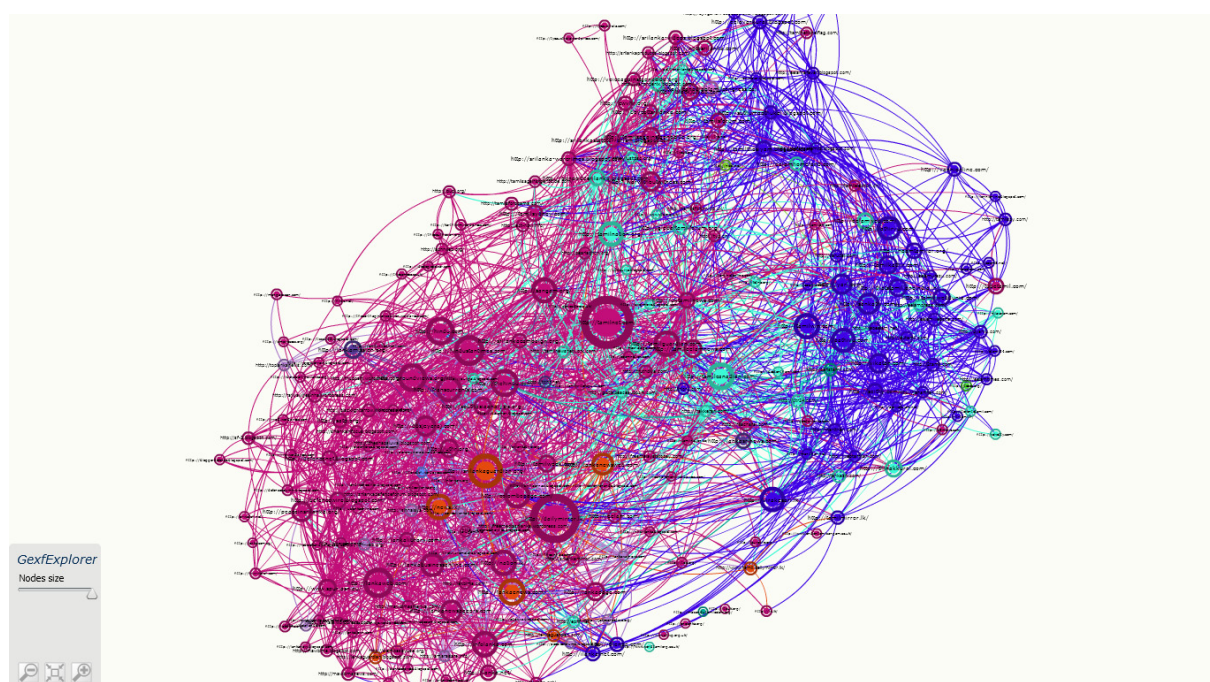


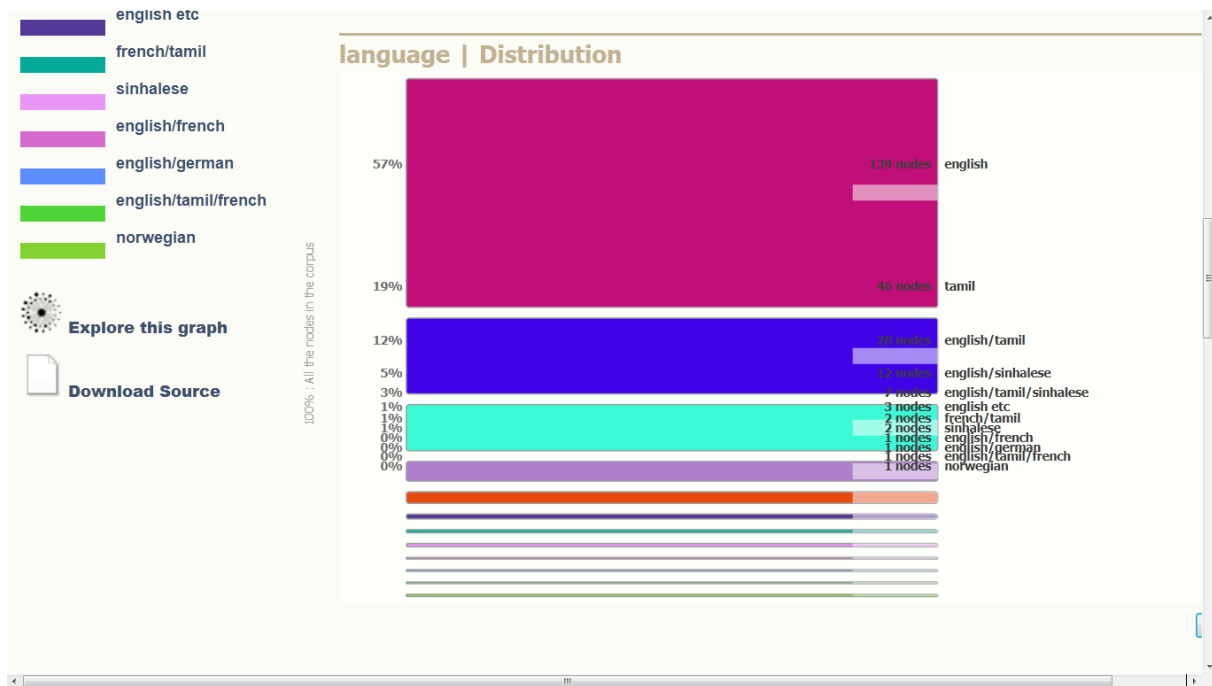


We can look to *globalpeacesupport.com* to analyze and gain a better understanding of corpus classification and community clustering. *Globalpeace-support.com* for example is presented in both English and Tamil - explaining its placement in the middle of the corpus map. Language appears to be a main category of classification in the effective shaping of the corpus and community clusters. It

is clear that websites presented in both English and Tamil serve as a segue for nodes presented in either one of the two languages. By isolating the corpus for language, we note the extensive use of English within websites (57%, 139 nodes) on the bottom left<sup>24</sup>.

24. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26>





English remains the predominant language of interaction for Tamil websites. It follows that, the two key authorities of the corpus: *tamilnet.com* and *dailymirror.lk* extend beyond their unilingual boundaries. As representative authorities, (English nodes cited by nodes in other languages), *tamilnet.com* is cited by 46 external nodes, compared to 33 of *dailymirror.lk* (out of 243 websites)<sup>25</sup>. The level of interlinkages stemming from these authorities cannot be understated. Consider that as a platform of influence, out of the entire corpus selection (243 websites), *tamilnet.com* is referred to by 105 websites, and cites just 6 websites<sup>26</sup>. Citing only 3 external website nodes, *dailymirror*.

25. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&attribut=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26>

26. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=71&map=58&node=19&section=26>

*lk* is referred to by 96 websites – a clear disproportionate influence within the corpus<sup>27</sup>.

Linguistic based analysis of the corpus highlights the importance and reliance on the above authorities within Tamil networks. More specifically however, we can note the expansionary aspects of language when considering node citing trends of external attracting authorities. The top two external attracting authorities, (non-English nodes cited by the most English nodes) *srilankaguardian.org* and *news.lk* for example are trilingual and are presented in English, Tamil and Sinhalese<sup>28</sup>.

27. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=71&map=58&node=139&section=26>

28. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26&value=english>

### External Attracting Authorities

Nodes outside english  
that are cited by the most nodes in english

Node name	Inbound edges FROM english
<a href="http://srilankaguardian.org/">http://srilankaguardian.org/</a> (english/tamil/sinhalese)	42
<a href="http://news.lk/">http://news.lk/</a> (english/tamil/sinhalese)	30
<a href="http://lankaenews.com/">http://lankaenews.com/</a> (english/tamil/sinhalese)	27
<a href="http://tamilnation.org/">http://tamilnation.org/</a> (english/tamil)	19
<a href="http://tamilcanadian.com/">http://tamilcanadian.com/</a> (english/tamil)	18
<a href="http://lankamission.org/">http://lankamission.org/</a> (english etc)	18
<a href="http://lankanewsweb.com/">http://lankanewsweb.com/</a> (english/tamil/sinhalese)	18
<a href="http://virakesari.lk/">http://virakesari.lk/</a> (tamil)	13
<a href="http://tamilwin.com/">http://tamilwin.com/</a> (tamil)	9
<a href="http://pathivu.com/">http://pathivu.com/</a> (tamil)	8

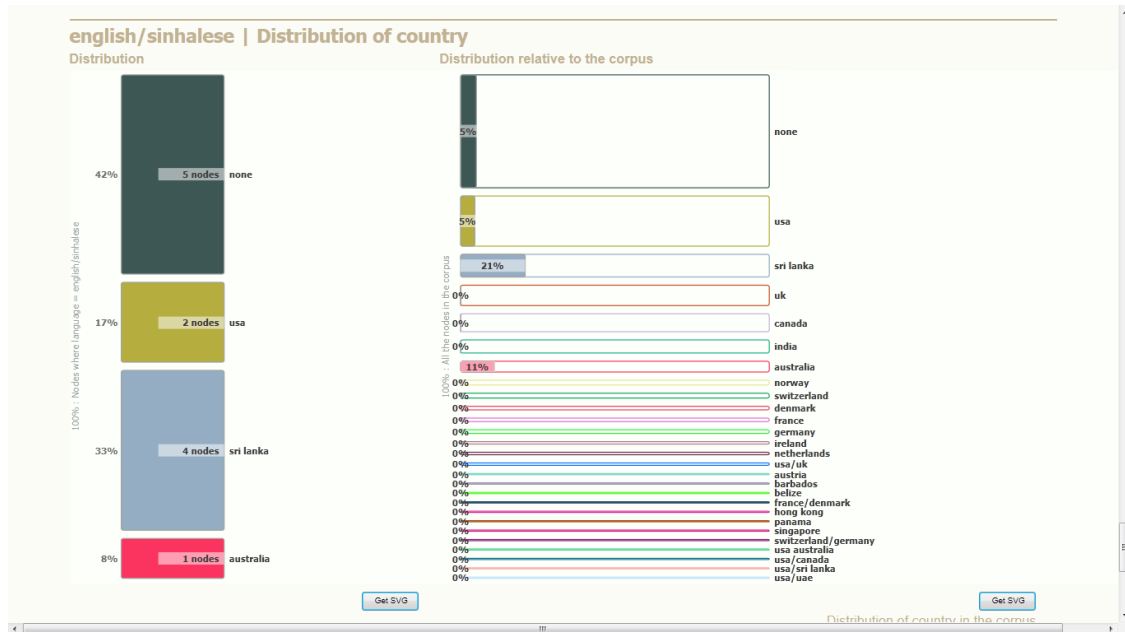




It is equally noteworthy to consider the complex role of the diaspora in propelling both Sinhalese and Tamil languages forward in online debates. Sinhalese for example is more prominent in U.S and Sri Lankan based websites. It is interesting to consider however, that the language is presented in characteristically bilingual and trilingual websites. When classified bilingually, English/

Sinhalese nodes account for 21% of all Sri Lankan websites and 5% of all U.S based websites (relative to the corpus)<sup>31</sup>.

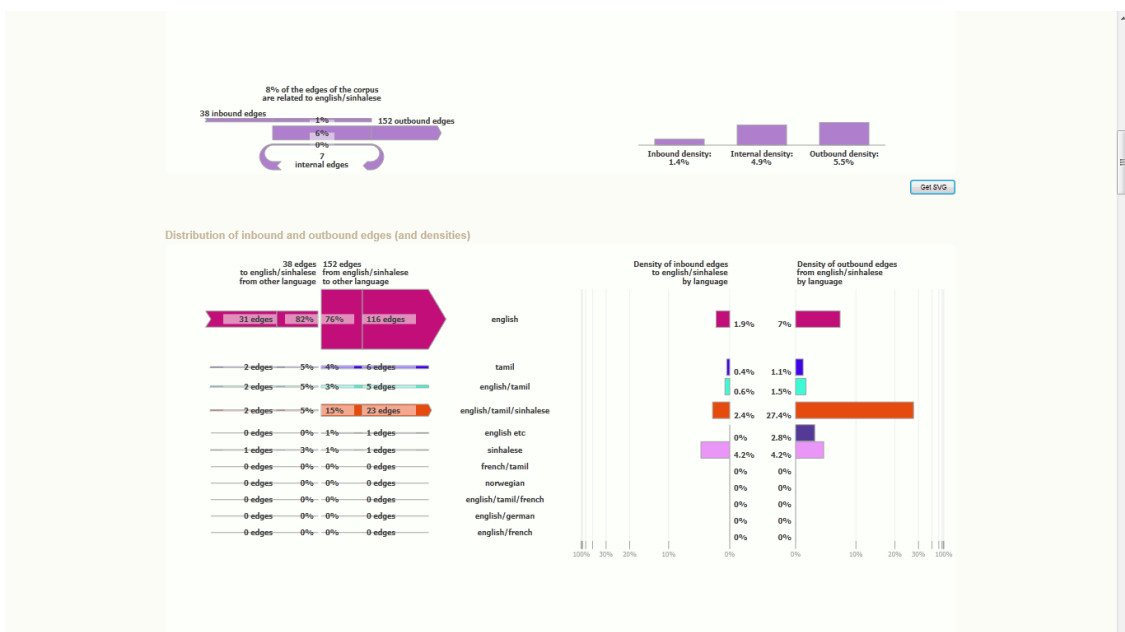
31. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26&value=english%252Fsinhalese>



English/Sinhalese websites have a greater out-bound density (5.5%) than inbound density

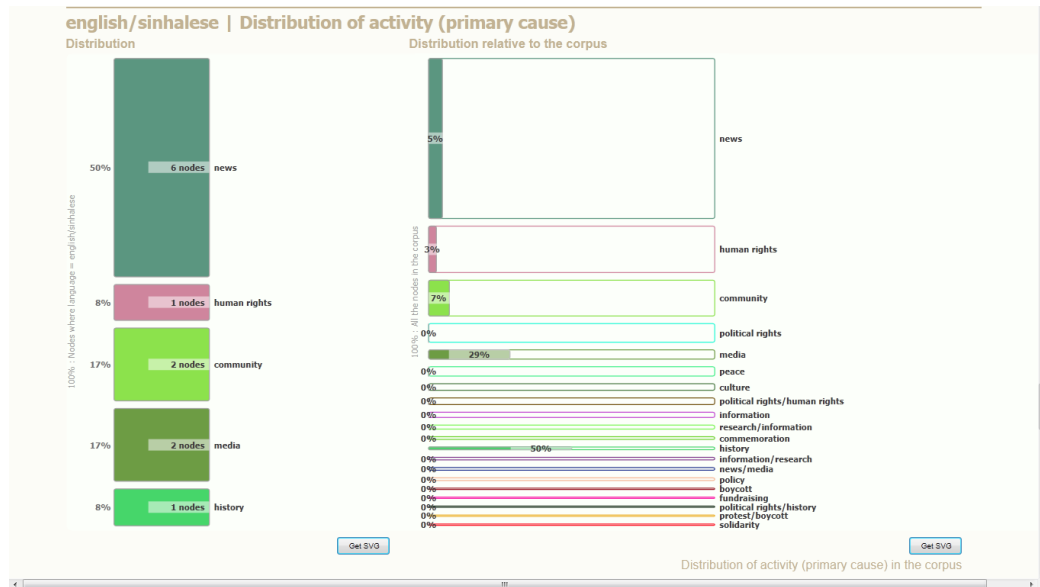
(1.4%) and hence are “in deficit”, a trend that will be explained below<sup>32</sup>.

32. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26&value=english%252Fsinhalese>



To account for the inbound deficit we can look to other characteristics of the English/Sinhalese portion of the corpus. For example, we can consider the type of website and type of activity that a large percentile of websites are classified as to infer and investigate node linkages. First we note the astounding outbound edge density (27.4%) to trilingual English/Tamil/Sinhalese websites. Such a strong outbound relation is attributed to having two languages of information exchange in

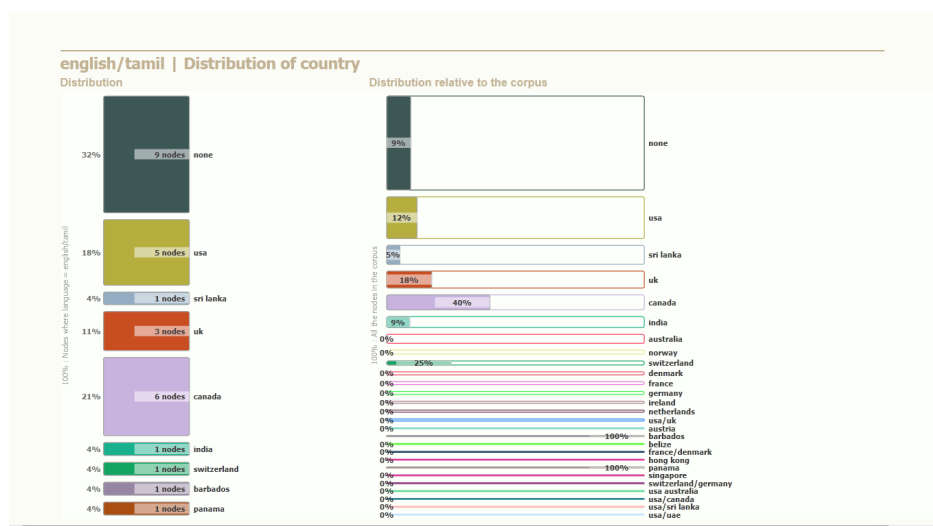
common. Secondly, based on corpus distribution, some 50% of English/Sinhalese nodes are classified as blogs. These websites characteristically discuss issues in a contained platform. That is, individual bloggers discuss issues at their discretion, where audiences may be relatively restricted. Conversely, bloggers may use external nodes for information, often provoking reactionary discussion and reflection.



The corpus also highlights the importance of linguistic flexibility within transnational diaspora networks. Distribution tables for example indicate that websites classified as Tamil/English account for only 4% of Sri Lankan nodes - compared to that of 11% for U.K based nodes, 18%

for U.S based nodes, and 21% for Canadian based nodes<sup>33</sup>.

33. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26&value=english%252Ftamil>

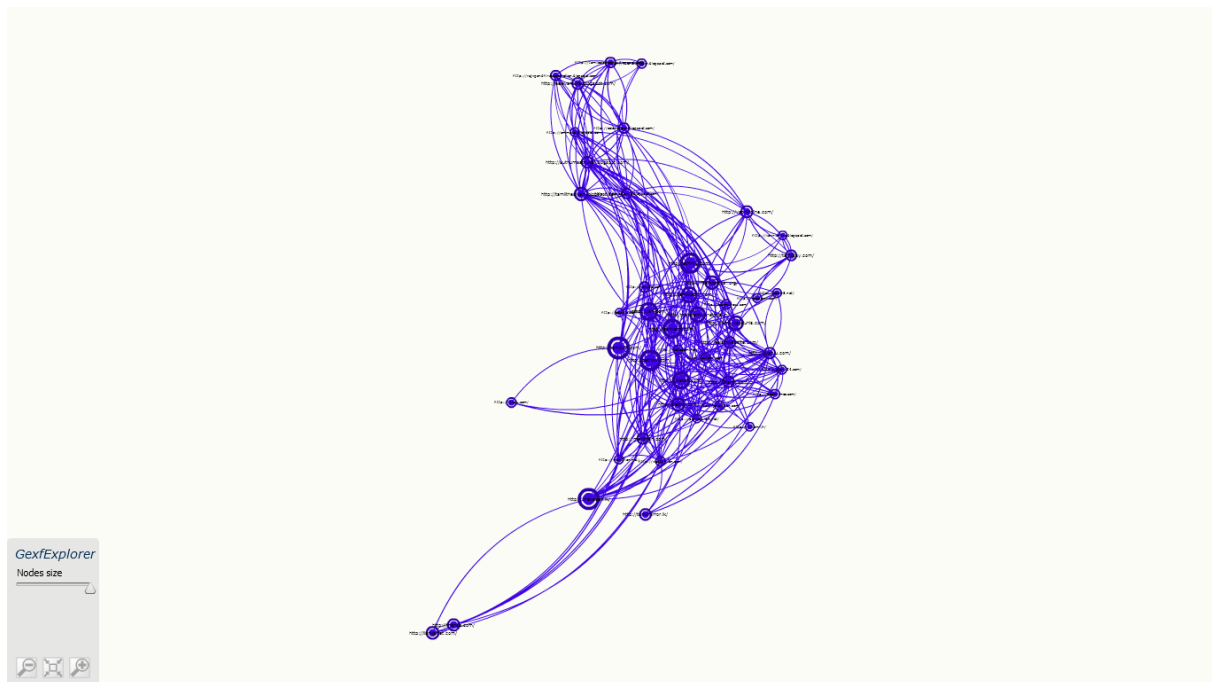


This is a considerable percentile differential and in the following section will be further explained. To clarify however, we cannot disregard the importance of the Tamil language within the homeland, as we note that 16% of websites based in Sri Lanka are classified as unilingually Tamil<sup>34</sup>. Isolating for Tamil moreover, again underscores the importance of news within virtual platform

34. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=8&section=26&cvalue=sri%2BBlanka>

links. Below we note the bridging qualities (on the bottom left) of *inioru.com* a Tamil language news website and *ilankainet.com* a Tamil language news blog<sup>35</sup>.

35. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=7&section=26&cvalue=tamil>



## Virtual and Physical Network Linkages

For the Tamil diaspora, virtual platforms have served as a means to strengthen and expand the opportunities surrounding host-homeland links. We observe this in the tying of language to conceptions of greater community identity. Following the chaotic legacy of migration moreover, contemporary questions of human rights violations often serve to reinvigorate sentiments of transnational unity inside and outside of the diaspora. Finally, as a framed backdrop, sophisticated news and savvy media techniques proactively structure the parameters of virtual platforms - effectively linking the diaspora to homeland affairs.

Ground realities within the homeland for example indicate a divisive prominence of Sinhalese - which carries with it various implications

in the context of online platforms. With the Sinhalese accounting for roughly 74% of the country's population (18 million), linguistic differences often weave themselves into grander themes of ethnic separation, political grievances and marginalization<sup>36</sup>. Most notable in this regard has been the 'Sinhala Only' policy of 1956, in which Sinhalese was made the country's only official language<sup>37</sup>. Institutionalized linguistic separation, while decades in the past, has certainly influenced present physical realities surrounding conceptions of 'ethnic community'. Web based interaction and exchange however is much more complex. To begin, in the context of this corpus, special focus was intentionally placed on uncovering the Tamil (specific) virtual platform. Although equally

36. Wayland 2004: 412

37. Fuglerud, O. 2001. 'Time and Space in the Sri Lanka-Tamil Diaspora'. *Nations and Nationalism* 7(2): 195-213, 31.



significant, Sinhalese websites were linked into the corpus based on how they are classified in predefined categories. That being said, English serves as a unifier for not only the Tamil corpus as a whole, but also greater Sri Lankan linkages. This is attributed to the scattering (in terms of both geography and generational linguistic ability) of transnational Tamil networks. On perhaps a more strategic scope, English carries with it global applicability beyond the diaspora.

Nodes classified as English/Sinhalese for example account for some 21% of Sri Lankan based websites<sup>38</sup>. Language is imperative for the effective networking of Tamil linkages. English unites populations such that beyond background, one can educate themselves on contentious topics at one's discretion. This does not ensure engagement in a tangible sense, rather, highlights that virtual and physical platforms at the very least serve as an increasingly united starting point for future activities.

As minorities in a host country, the physical realities of the Tamil diaspora remain intertwined in comparatively diverse and open societies (namely Canada, the U.S and the U.K). In response to such diversity and beyond linguistics, diaspora populations may in actuality opt to define themselves as primarily 'Sri Lankan' and secondarily 'Tamil'. Distinguishing between having Sinhalese versus Tamil roots may highlight the degree and conviction behind host-homeland links for individuals. Web based news and media may also provoke a sense of nostalgia for community members. As in the case of the Tamils, «conflict-generated diasporas» often hold amplified sentiments of grievances and attachments to homeland affairs<sup>39</sup>.

One must consider that majority of migration emerges as a result of the 1983 civil war. As previously mentioned, the greater Tamil community reads the 1983 civil war as a period of mass exodus<sup>40</sup>. Between 1983 and 1998 over 450,000 Sri Lankan Tamils were noted to be seeking asylum in both Western Europe and North Ame-

rica<sup>41</sup>. Such amplified migration patterns were particularly notable in Canada where the Tamil population increased from under 2,000 in 1983 to an estimated 200,000 after the 2000s (90% of whom reside in Toronto)<sup>42</sup>. Beyond virtual web platforms, for the greater Tamil diaspora, the legacy of migration has affected the motivations surrounding engagement. Community growth in host countries for example, has largely been reactionary due the civil unrest within Sri Lanka. Moreover, the mass majority of physical migration has occurred within the last 25 years - a fairly recent phenomena which carries with it many implications. Members for example, may hold a sense of guilt based nostalgia, as they feel incredibly 'lucky' to have escaped conflicting war zones; believing it to be their obligation to stay involved in homeland struggles from afar<sup>43</sup>. This can also funnel into ground activism, as the case with the Tamil Eelam Society, which provides social services to Tamils in Ontario, Canada<sup>44</sup>.

More frequently however, physical and virtual interaction focuses on establishing networked links often in response to increasingly disconnected/disengaged diaspora populations. Compared to the homeland, with various ethnic groups living side by side; host countries are incredibly diverse in terms of population composition. Linkages between the virtual and physical (if successful) serve to unify transnational diaspora pockets. In contemporary times moreover, the web often provides the platform necessary to provoke interest in homeland causes.

We have noted this in the emphasis placed on news and media within the Tamil corpus. In the quest for legitimacy, human rights based activity stands to also expand the relevancy of grievances both inside and outside of the diaspora. Beyond the greater diaspora for example, human rights may serve as a gateway into Tamil networks for external populations. Inside the diaspora conversely, efforts to engage youth and disconnected populations may focus on human rights - enhancing links to the greater community. We can note this in the documentary, "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields" presented by UK based Channel 4 in the summer of 2011. The documentary premiered to 700,000 viewers, however in the

38. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=71&map=58&nodeattribute=8&section=26&value=sri%2Blanka>

39. Lyons, T. 2006. "Diasporas and Homeland Conflict", in *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*. Kahler, M. and Walter B F. 2006. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 111.

40. Tekwani, 182.

41. Wayland 2004: 414

42. Ibid.

43. 418

44. 419

weeks that followed, went viral online<sup>45</sup>. This is attributed to the controversial nature of the documentary, which explored alleged war crimes and human rights violations against Tamil civilians at the hands of Sri Lankan authorities during the ending phases of civil up rise in 2009. With limited recourse, the Tamil diaspora expressed much shock towards the level of violence against civilians. News, community and human rights based websites continue to provide video links and clips of the documentary, provoking discussion inside and outside of the diaspora. Virtual news group *transcurrents.com* for example witnessed much online debate between followers, particularly on issues relating to documentary bias, authenticity and international accountability<sup>46</sup>. Although contentious, «Sri Lanka's Killing Fields» was a spark; effectively propelling Tamil relevancy for those curious about greater homeland affairs.

Efforts have consistently been made by Tamil actors to advance and expand the physical impact of virtual networks. The initial impetus for such proactive networking was both out of necessity and desire. As a means to keep a fairly contemporary (migration wise) diaspora community engaged within homeland affairs, websites are tasked with providing real-time current events. More importantly, virtual networks continue to be strategically savvy in order to not only avoid state led censorship but also maintain legitimacy as designated by community supporters.

Interestingly enough, a crucial example of this has been the gradual transformation of key corpus authority *tamilnet.com* which was first established by diaspora members in 1995<sup>47</sup>. *Tamilnet.com* stands as a pivotal example of how linkages and transnational networks are maintained amidst questions of legitimacy and authenticity of information. Within the first two years of the website's launch, online traffic was minimal, resulting

in an online revamping campaign by noted Tamil columnist Dharmeratnam Sivaram<sup>48</sup>. Sivaram had two main goals, to improve the longevity (avoid censorship) and ensure legitimacy of the website. To avoid the potential hurdles of domestic censorship, webmasters were strategically selected based on their locations within the diaspora<sup>49</sup>. Content wise, efforts were made to reduce nationalist rhetoric and martyr imagery. With news stories reading, "[a]nother journalist arrested", (20 July 1998) - information was stripped down to a 'just the facts' style news portrayal<sup>50</sup>. Through this 'just the facts' reformation, *tamilnet.com* gained a considerably higher following as a legitimate news provider. In fact, by 1997, only a year after its rebirth the website was noted to be recording approximately 3 million hits per month<sup>51</sup>. Today, some 15 years later, as visible in the corpus, the news group remains a fundamental authority in greater Tamil virtual networks<sup>52</sup>.

## Conclusion

Virtual platforms although non-static in nature have become a framework through which the Tamil diaspora increasingly maintain host-homeland linkages. Indeed, the web continues to expand the transnational opportunities and motivations available to respective diaspora members. As designated by key corpus authorities, web based news activity continues to be a significant force behind contemporary community consciousness. Like all web based activity, this does not imply that all people engage in online discussions (let alone virtual platforms in their entirety). Rather, beyond the diaspora, for those who wish to expand and contribute to networks, virtual platforms are indeed fruitfully available. The physical externalities of online activity are yet to be determined. However, as discussed in this paper, some very clear conclusions can be drawn. First, as previously mentioned, through the interactive nature of the web, contemporary news is far more efficient and expansionary in presenting information to individuals (both inside and outside of the diaspora). *Tamilnet.com* and *daily-mirror.lk* are distinct in that both websites offer

45. "Channel 4's Sri Lanka Documentary Draws 700,000 Viewers - June 14 2011" <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jun/15/channel-4-sri-lanka-documentary-tv-ratings>>

46. "Killing Fields: Recognition that Tamil Tigers were prepared to use as pawns the civilians they claimed to represent is commendable - June 19 2011". <<http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/1478>>

47. Whitaker, M. 1999. 'Internet Counter Counter-Insurgency: *TamilNet.com* and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka' in *Native on the Net: Indigenous Cyber-activism and Virtual Diasporas Over the World Wide Web*. Landzelius, K (1st ed) Routledge, 256.

48. 257

49. Whitaker 2004: 478

50. Whitaker 1999: 265

51. Whitaker 2004: 489

52. <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=map&map=58&section=26>

a diverse array of Tamil based news stories and opinion polls. Both websites promote interactive engagement within host and homeland affairs. Community grievances have yet to be resolved or reconciled - a key reason as to why news based websites are so significant in the corpus.

Second, and particularly the case for the Tamils, contentious group history binds a considerable amount of community sentiment to both human rights recourse and political reconciliation - all of which bleed into news affairs. Both provoke a sense of commitment and unity within the greater community. Finally, Tamil platforms continue to improve networking techniques through the effective management of websites. This includes the use of English to attract readership beyond the diaspora, as well as bilingual and trilingual alternatives to entice those within the diaspora and homeland to engage in community based exchanges. English, a comparatively universal language jumps both geographic and generational hurdles - both of which may ensure future relevancy. The Tamil case collectively highlights the importance of proactive networking in the effective maintenance of virtual platforms. With emphasis on transnational relevancy, the web stands to complexify host-homeland linkages - the impacts of which are yet to be entirely seen.

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