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Part 1 – The “Separatist Agenda”

My original question

First, The vast majority of complaints stemming from the Sikh community voiced over the motion did not stem from a separatist agenda, far from it. The concern mainly stemmed from the many Canadian Sikhs concerned with the revival of fictitious allegations that members of the Sikh community continue to support a violent struggle for a separate Sikh state in India.Fifth, The WSO’s mission statements do not have any statements concerning a separatist agenda. It is unclear why the CBC continues to propagate this myth.

Jack’s response

First, you wrote that the “vast majority” of the complaints about the Conservative Party motion “did not stem from a separatist agenda”. Rather, the complaints came from Canadian Sikhs concerned with the “revival of fictitious allegations” that they support a violent struggle for a separate state. Over past decades “this narrative has been proven false”, you said.

The Conservative motion was intended to trap the Liberals. It condemned terrorism, including “Khalistani extremism and the glorification of any individuals who have committed acts of violence”. Presumably, the reference here is to Talwinder Singh Parmar, the architect of the 1985 Air India bombing, whose portrait adorns some Sikh temples.

Here’s what Mr. Milewski wrote, “As soon as they got wind of it, the separatist lobby, led by the World Sikh Organization, peppered Ottawa with complaints that this was an attack on all Sikhs, not just violent ones”. He included a message from the WSO urging Sikhs to write or phone the Conservative leader about the motion.

“It was a familiar tactic”, he wrote, “claiming that a critique of extremists is an assault on all Sikhs”. And by morning the motion had been withdrawn and the WSO claimed its “blitz of messages” seemed to have worked.

Mr. Milewski did not say that the “vast majority” of messages came from separatists. What he said was that the “separatist lobby led by the WSO” urged its members to write to the Conservative leader and included the text of the WSO message. There is every reason to believe they did.

Fifth, you wrote that the WSO’s “mission statement” says nothing about “a separatist agenda”. In fact, I understand separatism is still a part of the WSO constitution or charter.

My concerns with Jack’s response

Who is the “separatist lobby”? The WSO? Individuals who opposed the motion?

Mr. Milewski wrote in his article:

“But there was a problem: as soon as they got wind of it, the separatist lobby, led by the World Sikh Organization, peppered Ottawa with complaints that this was an attack on all Sikhs, not just the violent ones.”

I took issue with this statement in the first part of my complaint to the CBC. Jack attempted to address my concerns above, when he stated:

“Mr. Milewski did not say that the ‘vast majority’ of messages came from separatists. What he said was that the ‘separatist lobby led by the WSO’ urged its members to write to the Conservative leader and included the text of the WSO message. There is every reason to believe they did.”

In my response, I will focus on these 2 statements. I want to understand who is being labeled by the CBC as “the separatist lobby,” and why. This is important, as there are negative connotations associated with this label. Generalizing a group in this manner is dangerous and dismissive. It discredits the motivations *Canadians* have in opposing the Conservative Party’s offensive, harmful motion.

Mr. Milewski’s statement is a claim that *all those* who “peppered Ottawa with complaints” were part of “the separatist lobby, led by the World Sikh Organization.” This is plainly false. I am not a “separatist,” but am part of the group who “peppered Ottawa with complaints.” And while I am not a separatist, I don’t believe there is anything wrong with those who believe in an independent Khalistan, so long as any actions taken or views expressed in furtherance of independence are peaceful. Labeling those who believe in an independent Khalistan as violent extremists is dangerous, and shouldn’t be implied in reporting.

I’m confused by Jack’s statement above, where he appears to try and clarify Mr. Milewski’s statement. Is he trying to say that the WSO is a separatist lobby, but supporters of the WSO (the WSO doesn’t really have “members”) who opposed the motion are not themselves separatists? If so, on what basis is the WSO a separatist lobby? “Lobby” is defined as “a group of persons engaged in lobbying especially as representatives of a particular interest group.”¹ “Lobbying” is defined as “to conduct activities aimed at influencing public officials and especially members of a legislative body on legislation.” Through my own research, not only was I unable to find any separatist lobbying activities that have been led by the WSO, I’m not able to find any active or inactive Canadian lobby with the word ‘Sikh’ or ‘Khalistan’². What activities has the WSO conducted that are aimed at influencing public officials to support Khalistan?

I’m not affiliated with the WSO, but am quite familiar with their work. While not at all exhaustive, some examples of the WSO’s actives include the following:

1. Acting as an intervener alongside various other faith groups to advocate for religious rights on behalf of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other non-Sikh Canadians. For example, see:
 - a. Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem
(<https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/2004/2004scc47/2004scc47.html>)
 - b. Loyola High School v. Quebec (Attorney General)
(<https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/2015/2015scc12/2015scc12.html>)

1 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lobbyist>

2 <https://lobbycanada.gc.ca/app/secure/ocl/lrs/do/advSrch>

- c. Law Society of British Columbia v. Trinity Western University (<https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/2018/2018scc32/2018scc32.pdf>)
2. Providing a legal defence on issues affecting the Sikh community that deal with improving integrative conditions for Sikhs in Canada: Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys (<https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/2006/2006scc6/2006scc6.html>)
3. Advocating on behalf of the Sikh community to help fight school bullying (which disproportionately affects children of the Sikh faith as a visible minority) and providing mentorship programs for Sikh youth.

In March, the WSO launched #AskCanadianSikhs. A campaign to encourage Canadians to engage directly with Sikhs in their communities for the purpose of fostering open dialogue, and avoid blindly associating Sikhs with violence and extremism. The reason this campaign is needed is not because of recent violent or terrorist activity. Rather, it's how Sikhs have been portrayed in countless articles and stories by the Canadian media over the past while. It's obvious that concerns over how Canadian Sikhs are being portrayed (and consequently how the general public perceives Sikhs) led the WSO to mobilize Canadian Sikhs to oppose the Conservative Party's motion earlier that month. As stated in the WSO's grass-roots communication (which I received as a Whatsapp message in my soccer group chat):

"Tomorrow, the Conservative Party of Canada is planning to use precious time in the House of Commons to force a debate on condemning 'Khalistani Terrorism'. Instead of using House of Commons time for things that will actually help people's lives, they are targeting the Sikh community and tarnishing us as extremists. There is no reason for starting this debate but the effect will be clear. Canadians are starting to see us as terrorists when we are not. This will damage us in the public eye and hurt our community immensely, especially our youth."

Nothing in this statement pushes a separatist agenda - on that I trust we can agree. And as a Canadian who lodged a complaint about the Conservative Party's motion, I can assure you my motivation was not to push a separatist agenda.

While I'm familiar with the WSO's work, I have been unable to find anything on their website or online to support Mr. Milewski's assertion that the WSO is a separatist lobby. As I wanted to be factually accurate in my response to you, I reached out to the WSO. Balpreet Singh Boparai, Legal Counsel for the World Sikh Organization of Canada confirmed that WSO International's constitution includes a clause saying that the WSO advocates for Khalistan. The WSO Canada's constitution doesn't speak to Khalistan, but says it accepts the WSO International's constitution. Mr. Boparai went on to state:

"That having been said, it's fairly clear from our website and activities that Khalistan isn't something that's on our agenda, though we aren't afraid to talk about it. I hope that clarifies."

The WSO Canada's mission statement, objectives, and program portfolio align with the above response.

Going back to the definition of "lobby," I trust we can agree that WSO Canada cannot be labeled a "separatist lobby" if it does not undertake actions aimed at influencing public officials to support Khalistan. If we agree and the CBC continues to support Mr. Milewski's assertion that there is a "separatist lobby led by the World Sikh Organization," then I ask that the CBC tell me what separatist lobbying activities WSO Canada has undertaken, and what evidence led the CBC to conclude that the WSO's opposition to the conservative motion was meant to sway public officials in favor of separatism.

My concern is that the CBC through Mr. Milewski's article took a clause from WSO Canada's constitution out of context and published misleading information about them and their supporters in order to fit a reckless narrative.

The WSO successfully mobilized Canadians to peacefully oppose the Conservative Party's motion. The CBC appears to misrepresent and discredit this movement as being part of a separatist agenda - an agenda that is somehow alleged to be aligned with violent extremism. It is troubling that not long after your reporting (as many including the WSO had feared), a wave of violent and racist incidents targeting vulnerable members of the Sikh community took place across the country. A few of these incidents were reported on:

1. **March 28:** An 18 year old international student had his turban ripped off in Ottawa (<https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/ottawa-sikh-community-rallies-around-victim-of-possible-hate-crime-1.3863208>)
2. **March 29:** Anti-Sikh graffiti emboldened by Terry's smear campaign - CBC ignored this in their reporting (<https://www.inbrampton.com/offensive-graffiti-targeting-sikhs-found-in-brampton>)
3. **April 6:** An 89 year old Sikh man was assaulted in Calgary (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/sikh-assault-calgary-obhrai-1.4608993>)

The CBC's actions have consequences. I have personally experienced discrimination as a direct result of misleading news coverage. I was not expecting to be targeted in further misleading coverage by being labeled part of a "separatist lobby."

I opposed the motion because it unfairly singled out the Sikh community, despite there being no imminent terrorist threat to Canadians from Sikhs. In fact, the 2017 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada (<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/pblc-rprt-trrrst-thrt-cnd-2017/index-en.aspx>) doesn't even mention Sikhs. I was 4 years old when the Air India tragedy occurred. I have never come across any member of the Sikh community that would condone any act of violent extremism, especially the horrific tragedy of Flight 182, in which 329 men, women, and children were ruthlessly murdered. A number of my friends opposed the motion after expressing similar sentiments. Yet we are being painted as separatists, and somehow by extension, violent extremists.

For the reasons set out above, I don't believe the WSO or those who reached out to the Conservative Party (including myself) to oppose the motion were acting as part of a separatist lobby. Please provide the evidence that led you to come to this conclusion. Please also clarify who else is part of the "separatist lobby" that was "led by the WSO." It seems as though everyone who opposed the motion has been lumped into a single, vague bucket. I welcome any clarification, should this be a misunderstanding. Otherwise, I'd expect the integrity of the CBC require a correction be made to give balance to what I currently believe is an offensive story.

Part 2 – Allegation that “Sikh nationalism..manifested in a violent way **has** infiltrated Canadian politics”

My original question

The concern mainly stemmed from the many Canadian Sikhs concerned with the revival of fictitious allegations that members of the Sikh community continue to support a violent struggle for a separate Sikh state in India. In past decades, every attempt by the Indian media and government to give credence to this narrative has been proven false. Yet the CBC continues to push this narrative. During an interview on the article, the CBC anchor pointedly asked a question in which the context was not clear but the message to Canadians was very much clear:

- “Terry, one of the reasons why we wanted to speak with you today was because you’ve written this commentary for CBC.ca “It’s the Atwal effect – and nobody’s Immune” for the opposition parties pointing fingers over Sikh extremism is proving to be tricky. Your argument is that this issue, how Sikh nationalism, when its’ manifested in a violent way has infiltrated Canadian politics up and down across all parties, tell me about that”
 - The mention of “Sikh extremism” and “Sikh nationalism” “manifested in a violent way” lacks significant context. It is unclear what acts of violence the anchor and the premise Milewski’s article seems to be referring to, but as a Canadian it comes across as though we are under some imminent threat. Where is the evidence?
 - Moreover, this is a continued pattern in which the CBC reports on fictitious, seemingly imminent, threats of violent Sikh extremism without providing context. The CBC ombudsman acknowledged this same issue in a response to a similar complaint following Terry’s awkward set of questions while interviewing Jagmeet Singh:
 - “I agree with Ms. Castle that the whole discussion might have been better framed there had been more context provided.”
- The mention of “Sikh extremism” and “Sikh nationalism” “manifested in a violent way” lacks significant context. It is unclear what acts of violence the anchor and the premise Milewski’s article seems to be referring to, but as a Canadian it comes across as though we are under some imminent threat. Where is the evidence?

Second, Terry accuses the members of the Sikh community of hanging Parmar’s picture and ‘glorifying the bomber’. This is not true and is extremely misleading. Not only does he fail to bring in credible members of the Sikh community to speak to the issue of Parmar’s pictures, he fails to cite the temple’s position that they believe Parmar did not carryout the bombing (here is an article that speaks to the Temple leader’s perspective, note that he had to speak through a translator:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/temple-defends-celebration-of-parmar/article683789/>

Glorification of a bomber and believing someone is innocent are two very different thing, and a distinction that is very noteworthy when communicating to the public who may not follow the issue regularly. Why not explore the issue concerning Parmar’s alleged innocence with the small number of

Sikhs who hold this belief rather than tell the Canadian public that members of the Sikh community continue to venerate the bomber?

Jack's response

Moreover, in reference to the television interview, you wrote that the “mention of ‘Sikh nationalism’, ‘Sikh extremism’ and ‘manifested in a violent way’ lacks significant context ... it’s unclear what acts of violence [the interviewer and Mr. Milewski] are referring to.” Again to be clear, during the interview, the program host cited Mr. Milewski’s just posted online article saying, “Your argument is that the issue of Sikh nationalism – when it’s manifested in a violent way – has influenced Canadian politics ... across all parties”.

Mr. Milewski carefully defined what he meant. He was not referring to all Sikhs or the Sikh community generally. He explained that all three federal parties, “to quote the former British Columbia Premier Ujjal Dosanjh, ‘play footsie’ with the separatist wing of the community, which is a very small minority, but nevertheless vocal and powerful politically”.

Although you feel that it is “unclear” what acts of violence Mr. Milewski is referring to. I think you will find that the most high-profile act of Sikh separatist violence is referenced throughout the story: The bombing of Air India flight 182 killing 329 men, women and children remains Canada’s deadliest mass murder. And perhaps the most apposite reference is to the man whose name appears in the headline above the story. Jaspal Atwal who was convicted of plotting to assassinate a visiting Indian cabinet minister in the name of Sikh separatism.

Second, you wrote that Mr. Milewski accuses members of the Sikh community of “hanging Parmar’s picture and ‘glorifying the bomber’”, something you describe as being “not true”. Moreover, you added that he did not speak with members of the temple who “believe Parmar did not carry out the bombing”.

It is a matter of fact that a poster of “martyred” Talwinder Singh Parmar hangs in some Sikh temples where he is honoured. As Mr. Milewski notes, Mr. Parmar’s role in planning the Air India attack was “accepted as fact” by the Air India inquiry. His central role in the attack was confirmed in the testimony of the man convicted of making the fatal bomb. That members of a British Columbia temple are said to disagree with the findings of the inquiry is well beyond the scope of this story.

My concerns with Jack's response

Mr. Milewski's fictitious allegations that members of the Sikh community continue to support a violent struggle for a separate Sikh state in India

As mentioned in Part 1 of my response, I opposed the PC motion because it created a false perception of an *imminent* threat of Sikh extremism to Canadians. In my original complaint, I also requested CBC clarify the *imminent* threat that Mr. Milewski appears to be raising warning signs over. However, Jack responded by restating my question as follows:

“Moreover, in reference to the television interview, you wrote that the “mention of ‘Sikh nationalism’, ‘Sikh extremism’ and ‘manifested in a violent way’ lacks significant context ... it’s unclear what acts of violence [the interviewer and Mr. Milewski] are referring to.”

I'm disappointed that Jack omitted the central part of my complaint when restating my question, which was: "it comes across as though we are under some imminent threat. Where is the evidence?"

As this is a complex and sensitive issue, I hope Jack's omission was unintended. Regardless, allow me to provide a few examples of how the article and interview gives the impression that Canadians should be weary of an *imminent* threat of Sikh extremism:

1. Ms. Fatah asked Mr. Milewski the following questions in the present tense:

"Your argument is that this issue, how Sikh nationalism, when its' manifested in a violent way has infiltrated Canadian politics up and down across all parties, tell me about that."

"Could you have imagined that this issue that seemingly does not seem very Canadian at all an idea of a Sikh nationalist state and the extremist elements of that campaign would still be a part of Canadian politics and still be discussed in 2018?"

By using the present tense, these statements imply that violent Sikh nationalism currently exists in Canada.

2. Mr. Milewski makes the following misleading statements in his article:

"The word "glorification," of course, takes aim at a painful topic for families of the victims of the Air India Flight 182 bombing: the re-branding of the man who planned the terrorist act as a saintly hero."

...

"He is Canada's deadliest mass-murderer by far: Talwinder Singh Parmar, the architect of the 1985 bombing, whose portrait adorns Sikh temples in Surrey, B.C. and Malton, Ont. Children are being taught that the man who blew 329 innocents out of the sky was a model citizen and a persecuted martyr."

Here Mr. Milewski accuses members of the Sikh community of hanging Parmar's picture and 'glorifying the bomber'. This implies that such members of the Sikh community support the horrific Air India bombing. This is not true and extremely misleading. Not only does Mr. Milewski fail to bring in credible members of the Sikh community to speak to the issue of Parmar's pictures, he fails to cite the temple's well-known position that they believe Parmar did not carry out the bombing. The President of the Dasmesh Darbar temple (speaking through a translator) clearly states that he "unequivocally condemns those involved the Air-India bombing disaster" and that he "does not support an armed struggle for Khalistan or those who advocate violence" (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/temple-defends-celebration-of-parmar/article683789/>). The Dasmesh Darbar is the Surrey temple Mr. Milewski refers to in his article. I would speak to the Malton temple, but after visiting the most well known temple in Malton, I was not able to locate a photograph of Parmar. I have been unable to find out which temple this is (though I would like to know if you could pass along that information).

Glorification of a bomber and believing someone is innocent are two very different things. Responsible reporting would require this distinction be made. Instead, in the interview, Mr. Milewski quickly dismisses the motivation of those few who hang Parmar's picture:

“... after the bombing they couldn’t successfully bring a case and the leader of the plot Talwinder Parmar, the man with the posters, he fled the country and killed by the Indian police in 1992 so he’s never brought to trial and so that’s given Sikh separatists a handy way to convince politicians not to condemn Parmar because he was never convicted. Well by that standard we should put up martyr posters for Hitler and Bin Laden and every suicide bomber ever I guess because they were never convicted. Fact of that matter is that none of us understood at the beginning that this problem would endure because it was a Canadian not a exclusively an Indian problem.”

Mr. Milewski’s statement that Parmar’s lack of a conviction is the reason “Sikh separatists” are able to “convince politicians not to condemn Parmar”, and that by extension, martyr posters should be put up for Hitler, Bin Laden, and “every suicide bomber ever”, is a ridiculous logical fallacy. Let’s be clear. Hitler, Bin Laden, and “every suicide bomber ever” committed horrific crimes, and should be condemned. There’s no debate on that. Likewise, the Dasmesh Darbar temple unequivocally condemns those involved in the Air-India bombing. They do so because they believe Parmar was innocent. It’s fine to disagree with this belief. Many people (including myself) do. But you have to remember the time in which the Air India tragedy occurred. The events that took place after the horrific assault on the Golden Temple (which traumatized the Sikh community worldwide) and acts of genocide that took place after Indira Gandhi’s assassination (which were labeled a genocide by the Ontario and New Delhi governments), left many Sikhs with a deep distrust of the Indian government, a distrust compounded by fake encounters dating back to 1982³ in which Sikhs were targeted for extra-judicial murder and torture by Indian authorities^{4,5,6} (which are also similar to the circumstances reported around Parmar’s death⁷). I don’t intend on delving into the complexities of dysphoric Sikh relations with India. My purpose in bringing this up is to emphasize that it is far too simplistic and problematic to simply dismiss the Dasmesh Darbar’s *motivation* for hanging Parmar’s picture.

If Mr. Milewski took the time in his article to single out two Sikh temples, it is not “well beyond the scope of this story” (as Jack states in his response) to specify *why* such temples hang Parmar’s picture. It is necessary, responsible reporting.

Can you describe the CBC’s criteria to determine whether something is within the scope of a story? I would think inclusion of the views of the organization or individual that is the subject of a story be within scope, in order to ensure the audience isn’t misled or that the views of the organization/individual are not misrepresented. Doesn’t this strike at the core of balanced, responsible journalism? Particularly if the result generates a false sense of fear and anger towards a very visible minority community?

3 <http://www.unipune.ac.in/snc/cssh/HumanRights/02%20STATE%20AND%20ARMY%20-%20POLICE%20REPRESSION/I-Punjab%20%20Harayana/4.pdf>

4 <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/16/world/killings-by-police-stir-punjab-s-fury.html>

5 <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2013/07/02/i-killed-83-innocent-sikhs-in-staged-encounters-on-directions-of-high-ups-in-punjab-police-surjit-singh-si/>

6 <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19950731-cbi-indicts-pilibhit-police-for-killing-sikhs-in-fake-encounters-807581-1995-07-31>

7 <https://www.ctvnews.ca/air-india-inquiry-to-probe-alleged-confession-1.250659>

3. In the interview, Mr. Milewski states:

“all three of these parties have been reluctant to confront Sikh extremists.”

This implies there are currently Sikh extremists in Canada, which in turn implies a threat of imminent violence. Who are these Sikh extremists that the Liberals, PC, and NDP are reluctant to confront?

Mr. Milewski appears to defend his argument that violent extremists have “*infiltrated Canadian politics*” on the following grounds:

- a. Atwal, convicted 30 years ago, requested and received an invite to the Liberal convention.
 - i. It’s clear from reporting that the government of India believed Atwal “had been reformed”⁸ and the statement from Canada’s national security advisor that Atwal is “no longer considered as a threat and no longer espouses the cause of an Independent Khalistan.” In fact, the CBC’s good friend Ujjal Dosanjh assisted Atwal in his attempt to obtain an Indian Visa way back in 2006.⁹
- b. The Dashmesh Darbar has hung up and maintains a picture of Talwinder Parmar and claims he is a martyr.
 - i. Without reiterating everything set out above, the President of the Dasmesh Darbar temple “unequivocally condemns those involved the Air-India bombing disaster” and “does not support an armed struggle for Khalistan or those who advocate violence.”
- c. The WSO led the movement to oppose the conservative motion.
 - i. Without reiterating everything set out in my response to the first question, the WSO is a human rights group. They are far more active and focused on matters of Sikh integration within Canada (which the motion threatened), than with the Khalistani separatist movement. To simply dismiss the WSO as a “separatist lobby” is misleading and ignores the struggle many Sikhs face in Canada as a very visible minority.

The well-known and publicized facts set out above are not consistent with: (a) Mr. Milewski’s allegation that a violent extremist movement has infiltrated Canadian politics (because he has not provided evidence that a violent extremist movement exists); or (b) that children are being taught that the man who blew up 329 innocents was a model citizen (because there is no evidence of this either); or (c) Jack’s statement that the focus of the story is “the seemingly troublesome relationship Canada’s three main political parties have with Sikh separatists.”

⁸<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/now-india-says-atwal-came-on-valid-visa/555606.html>

⁹<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/jaspal-atwals-attempt-to-get-indian-visa-in-2006-had-also-created-controversy-in-canada/articleshow/63050204.cms>

Mr. Milewski's article and interview create a perception that elements within the Sikh community are posing an *imminent* threat to the safety of Canadians and to our democracy. Going back to my original complaint:

"it comes across as though we are under some imminent threat. Where is the evidence?"

In his response, Jack answered by referring to the most high profile act of Sikh separatist violence - the Air India bombing of over 30 years ago. Jack felt compelled to point out to that "329 men, women and children were murdered" in this tragedy. To make it very clear, I have yet to meet *anyone* who defends this heinous act of terrorism. This includes the most ardent supports of Khalistan that I have come across in my days.

The problem in Mr. Milewski's article and interview is the implication that those who believe in a sovereign Sikh state are violent extremists. This simply isn't true. Jasjit Singh, Research fellow at the University of Leeds has conducted extensive research on this issue, and summarizes the current state of affairs as follows (<https://nationalpost.com/pmnl/news-pmnl/is-sikh-extremism-really-active-in-canada>):

"In my research, I made use of Sophia Moskalkenko and Clark McCauley's distinction between radicalism and activism where "radicalism" is a "readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action" while activism is a "readiness to engage in legal and non-violent political action."

Given these definitions, it's clear that although the events in India in 1984 saw an immediate "radical" reaction from Sikhs around the world, much of the contemporary political activity being labelled "Sikh extremism" or "radicalism" is in fact activism focused on social justice."

What we have seen is a pattern of fictitious allegations hurled at Canadian Sikhs by Indian government officials. This includes ridiculous reports of fictitious terrorist camps operating in BC as well as allegations that the Canadian Minister of Defence is a supporter of Khalistani terrorism.¹⁰

Let's be frank - *there isn't an article if violent Sikh nationalism died around 20 years ago*. So again, I ask the CBC - *it comes across as though we are under some imminent threat. Where is the evidence?*

¹⁰ <https://www.straight.com/news/1038971/jagdeesh-mann-khalistan-terror-has-died-khalistan-targeting-has-not>

Part 3 – Misleading Inaccuracies in Atwal Reporting

My original question

- Fourth, During an interview related to the article on CBC, Milewski does mention the removal from the black list, however misleads his viewers by his subjective assessment that Atwal was removed a ‘very long time ago’, implying there could not have been any link to Trudeau’s trip. Many audience members may not think that 2017 was a ‘very long time ago’, however Milewski fails to mention any specifics around the timing. A reporter should stick to the facts especially in cases where he has no business being inserted as an authority on a particular topic. This raises an additional concern:
 - The undermining of our Canadian government, the credibility of security services, is a dangerous precedence to set especially when it is done in favour of a foreign government known for its’ oppressive treatment of minority constituents.

Jack’s response

Fourth, you wrote that although in the interview Mr. Milewski said Mr. Atwal had been removed from the Indian government’s blacklist, he said it was a “very long time ago”, “but fails to mention any specifics around the time.” You wrote that 2017 was not a “very long time ago”.

One aspect of the controversy surrounding the affair was why Mr. Atwal – a convicted would-be assassin – was given a visa and permitted to enter India. Some speculated that his name was deliberately dropped from the Indian government blacklist to facilitate his visit as part of a plan to label Prime Minister Trudeau soft on Sikh separatists.

In the interview Mr. Milewski dismissed that speculation as at best improbable. He said that the Indian government, starting under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and continuing under current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had cut way back on the list. And, he said, Mr. Atwal “had been to India several times before”. “So, I don’t think [Indian intelligence services] took Atwal off the list long ago in anticipation this might become a possibility”.

I see The Indian Express in a February story credits a “source” saying Mr. Atwal was taken off the list “last year” – which may be what you are referring to – although the story went on to say he has been “engaging” with the Indian government for the last three years. Others suggest it may have been longer than that. When, or even if, he was taken off the list, is not something that’s likely to be officially confirmed. However, the fact that he has been travelling to India suggests it may have been some time ago, as Mr. Milewski said.

My concerns with Jack’s response

Mr. Milewski appears to speculate rather than stick to facts when it comes to the issuance of Atwal’s visa.

I pointed out a concern with Mr. Milewski having failed to mention known facts about the timing of Mr. Atwal’s removal from the Blacklist in 2017. In Jack’s response, he wrote the following:

“the fact that [Atwal] has been travelling to India suggests it may have been some time ago, as Mr. Milewski said.”

However, Mr. Milewski did not say that “it may have been some time ago”. His response to the interviewer was conclusive:

“it’s very well known that the Indian black list of people not to be given visas ever to go to India was cut way back, long ago, starting under the previous PM Manmohan Singh and continuing under the present prime minister Narindra Modi... I don’t think they took Atwal off the list long ago in the anticipation that this might become the possibility.”

The CBC reported¹¹ that Atwal was denied a visa after it expired in 2007 and also confirmed that he was blacklisted from visiting India. Atwal was unable to obtain a VISA again until his next trip to India in 2017. This contradicts Mr. Milewski’s article.

Jack further wrote that “when, or even if, he was taken off the list, is not something that’s likely to be officially confirmed.” Daniel Jean gave a statement as part of his testimony in front a parliamentary committee on April 16th, that Atwal’s name was removed from a “so-called government blacklist in 2017.” In response to questions on how Atwal received his visa, Raveesh Kumar, an official spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs in India, provided a very clear statement that Atwal was given a visa in 2017 as part of “outreach to the Indian diaspora, including misguided elements”.¹²

In the interview, Mr. Milewski also stated that the second reason he had not to believe the “plot theory” was because Atwal received an invite from a Canadian MP. However, Atwal admitted that he had actually requested the invite himself which ultimately led to the disastrous oversight for the Liberals on the part of MP Sarai. That would have been an important fact to note, because it opens the door to the type of collusion that was being alleged. Although I will admit that this may have not been known to Mr. Milewski at the time of the interview (I didn’t hear about it until Atwal’s press conference), it reinforces the concern I originally stated and adds to the perception that facts are being withheld to effectively mislead the audience into thinking that a threat to Canadian safety is imminent.

¹¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/atwal-trudeau-india-trip-reaction-1.4551499>

¹² <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/now-india-says-atwal-came-on-valid-visa/555606.html>

Part 4 – Unscrupulous and Imbalanced Reporting

My original question

Lastly, there are common concerns from Canadian Sikhs concerning the application of CBC news' policy on fair/balanced reporting as it relates to the Sikh community. On the Sikh 'extremism' topic, Terry has published 20+ articles as well as a number of documentaries and interviews without mentioning:

- 1) affect that years of religious persecution leading up to and following operation blue star has had on Can-Sikhs
- 2)unprecedented level of media censorship imposed on Punjab during said period
- 3) censorships affect on factual reporting
- 4) the extensive history of Indian intelligence manipulating Can-Sikh communities.

Without this context, the average Canadian lacks an understanding of what led to a Sikh struggle for an independent homeland.. To sum up, you don't actually have to say the words "all Sikhs are extremists" to make Canadians perceive them that way. I always thought this was why CBC had a policy for fair and balanced reporting, but this subject seems to repeatedly slip through the cracks. There's lots of research on ethics and role of media in shaping public perception available online. Although it's not necessary to look at extensive research in this case, this recent article helps articulate on this very subject:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-sikh-canadian-dismayed-by-extremism-allegations/>.

Jack's response

[Sixth], on a broader front, you wrote that you feel CBC has been "unfair" and "unbalanced" in its coverage of the Canadian Sikh community. More specifically, you wrote that the many stories CBC has published or broadcast about Sikh "extremism" have not mentioned such things as the years of Sikh religious persecution, "unprecedented censorship" imposed on Punjab, and the "history of Indian intelligence manipulating" Canada-Sikh relations.

It is part of our obligation to convey information about the Sikh community and its activities clearly and, of course, fairly. Inevitably some things are left out, but that does not mean those stories are inaccurate. Editors cannot reasonably be expected to include all the information available – particularly on an issue as complex and sometimes controversial as this one – in a relatively brief article. But over a period of time you will find a wide range of information and opinions is included in those stories, including the kind of information you cited.

My concerns with Jack's response

I'm deeply troubled by Jack's statement: *"Inevitably some things are left out, but that does not mean those stories are inaccurate."*

"In propaganda truth pays... It is a complete delusion to think of the brilliant propagandist as being a professional liar. The brilliant propagandist is the man who tells the truth, or that selection of the truth which is requisite for his purpose, and tells it in such a way that the recipient does not think he is

receiving any propaganda... [...] The art of propaganda is not telling lies, but rather selecting the truth you require and giving it mixed up with some truths the audience wants to hear.”¹³

Throughout my response I have pointed to examples where critical facts that do not support the author’s bias were omitted with the effect of misleading the audience. I am deeply troubled because this stance by CBC management opens the door for journalists to push pre-existing biases and publish what is effectively harmful propaganda against minorities with impunity. I can appreciate why some members of the Sikh community were reluctant to engage with the CBC¹⁴, particularly after the dubious and offensive documentary that aired in 2007 (“*Samosa politics*”).

Jack also stated “*over a period of time you will find a wide range of information and opinions is included in those stories, including the kind of information you cited.*” Unfortunately, I did a quick review of the CBC’s reporting on this subject and I have not found this to be the case.

Understanding why so many in the Sikh community are suspicious of the Indian government is very relevant to the issue of Parmar’s pictures and why this particular temple in BC seems to be hellbent on defending the innocence of someone like Parmar. Extra judicial murder (as was reportedly the case for Parmar), torture, and rape of innocent Sikhs is not a matter of fiction. It is a known fact that extrajudicial murders began in the early 80s, many years before the militant Khalistan movement took shape.¹⁵ There are plenty of examples that I can point to where the CBC, despite extensive coverage on alleged Sikh extremism, has been completely mute on news implicating the government of India (some of which have clear connections to Canadian citizens). To name a few:

1. Jaswant Singh Khalra, a human rights lawyer and activist, uncovered thousands of cases where Sikh youth in Punjab were murdered in the decades following the 1984 Sikh genocide. By researching and travelling to Canada, the US, and other countries, he proved that claims by the Indian government that missing Sikh youth were terrorists hiding in other countries were false, and the youth were in fact murdered by Indian authorities. He uncovered cremation sites, mass graves, and various other pieces of evidence before *he was himself kidnapped*, tortured, and murdered in police custody¹⁶ shortly after delivering a speech in Canada’s parliament building¹⁷. His portrait was installed in the Ontario provincial legislature this past spring as part of Sikh heritage month.
2. As recently as 2016, the BBC¹⁸ and India Today¹⁹ magazine among other media outlets have reported that Indian authorities are now being tried and have been convicted of killing

13 Scot Macdonald (2007). *Propaganda and information warfare in the twenty-first century: altered images and deception operations*. Taylor & Francis. p. 35. ISBN 978-0-415-77145-0.

14 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/controversial-photos-displayed-at-surrey-s-vaisakhi-parade-1.729743>

15 <http://www.unipune.ac.in/snc/cssh/HumanRights/02%20STATE%20AND%20ARMY%20-%20POLICE%20REPRESSION/I-Punjab%20n%20Harayana/4.pdf>

16 <https://www.ensaaf.org/programs/legal/khalra/>

17 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtcNwq0wICU>

18 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35965553>

innocent Sikhs to earn career progression. I've noticed that the CBC (even in the 'World' section) has avoided the subject.

3. The most blatant example that extinguished any doubt in my mind of the bias held by Mr. Milewski was when he used his official CBC account to tweet: *"Justice! Human Rights! More on what Talwinder Parmar's Babbar Khalsa was really like when it had the chance."* The problem is that the screenshot he tweeted was one paragraph out of a 40 page report that alluded to acts of terror that the Indian government alleged to have been perpetrated by Khalistani terrorists. The rest of the 40 page report by Amnesty International detailed evidence of extreme acts of torture, child rape, and murder against Sikhs in Punjab including a report that an innocent Canadian citizen was kidnapped and murdered by Indian authorities. Once again, the murder of a Sikh was not deemed important enough to be newsworthy by Mr. Milewski. In response to my Tweet, Terry wrote:



In his own words he has outright refused to hear the perspective of Canadian Sikhs and so remains ignorant of why some within the Sikh community continue to have a deep distrust of the Indian government and question the findings of an inquiry that did not probe the topic.

It is not my desire that the CBC take on an initiative to begin comprehensive reporting on human rights violations against the Sikh community and I can appreciate the risk of economic retribution from India. But if you choose to report on related topics, I would expect the coverage to be balanced. If you have any doubt that Mr. Milewski's cherry picking of facts has misled Canadians about the views of some Canadian Sikhs, I can refer you to one of his Twitter followers that I personally had an exchange with. After pointing out that Mr. Milewski repeatedly omits the fact that Parmar's supporters have condemned the bombing, this twitter follower was quick to agree with my opinion that it amounted to fear mongering:

19 <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19950731-cbi-indicts-pilibhit-police-for-killing-sikhs-in-fake-encounters-807581-1995-07-31>



There have been other exchanges in which Mr. Milewski's supporters delete their posts after realizing that they were misled to believe allegations concerning Sikh extremism. Some of them have recommended that I submit a complaint to the CBC ombudsman, which has led to this submission.

