# The Indian and Polish Transnational Organisational Fields

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## Abstract

Although the cross-border engagements of immigrants have received an increasing attention since the 1990s, the role of migrant organisations in this process has spurred comparatively little interest. As a consequence, efforts to conceptualise migrant organising in the transnational sphere have been relatively scarce. This paper seeks to contribute to this effort by proposing a more systematic definition and use of the concept of transnational organisational fields. This endeavour is illustrated by two case studies based on research carried out within the TRAMO project (Diffusion and Contexts of Transational Migrant Organisations): Indian and Polish organisations in the UK. The intent is to show that much can be gained by adopting a bird's-eye view on the networks that bind together migrant organisations within and outside the country of settlement. The two case studies display two opposite forms of structuring. In the Polish case, the formation of the field was managed by a central institution (the Polish government in exile) while, in the Indian case, there was a decentralised process. These discrepancies have consequences on the shape and contents of cross-border activities of migrant organisations.

**Author:** Thomas Lacroix, Research Officer, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford. Email: thomas.lacroix@qeh.ox.ac.uk

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# Introduction

From the initiation of migration flows to the consolidation of diaspora-wide networks, from the settlement of newcomers to the assimilation of ethnic communities, there is hardly any domain of migration where migrant organisations do not have any role to play, even if remote or indirect. Despite their relevance to a wide range of issues, the study of migrant organisations has long been confined to a relatively marginal subset of race relations and integration studies. Their absence from any general theory of migration is striking. They are usually referred to as a subset of social capital approaches (Massey et al. 1998: 130). The same could be said of mainstream theories about diaspora or transnationalism. Between the micro level of social networks and the macro level of labour market differentials, a theoretical vacuum is yet to be filled.

During the last decade, the transnational approach has highlighted the importance of migrant organisations in maintaining cross-border ties between sending and arrival countries. Several research programmes have addressed the transnational outreach of migrant organisations. The CIOP (Comparative Immigrant Organisation Programme) in the US (Portes et al. 2008), LOCALMULTIMODEM focusing on immigrant associations in Spain (Morales and Jorba 2009), and the Volkswagen Foundation-funded TRAMO (Diffusion and Contexts of Transnational Migrants' Organisations) are three examples of a series of recent studies on the matter. This surge of interest was rather unforeseen. Scholars of transnationalism had initially taken individuals and networks as privileged units of analysis. The lack of account of immigrant volunteering and organising in the theories about the formation of migration networks, transnational fields or diasporic communities is patent.

The intention of this paper is not to fill this gap by formulating an ambitious and far-reaching theory of migration which would take into account the organising process as a leading force of migration at large. My aim is to contribute to this emerging debate by bringing to the fore the concept of the 'transnational organisational field'. This concept sheds light on the functioning and evolution of interlocked networks of organisations in the transnational sphere. The study of transnational organisational fields offers a mirror which reflects the evolution of immigrant communities maneuvering between two often contradictory pressures: adaption processes in the place of arrival and the will to maintain cross-border ties with origin (or third) countries. Transnational organisational fields provide a lens through which it becomes possible to highlight the multiplicity of cross-border social fields or observe their making, becoming and unmaking.

This paper is based on the findings of research on Polish and Indian associations in the UK carried out in the framework of the aforementioned TRAMO project. A listing of Polish and Indian organisations was marshalled by combining two national-level sources: the charity commission directory and the directory on religious organisations put together by Derby University (Weller 2007). Complementary research has been carried out using the internet, the British Telecom phone book and local databases. This led to the identification of 389 Polish and 1210 Indian organisations. The database includes information about the name, the year of creation, the place where it holds its headquarters, the main activity and the transnational orientation. A follow-up study has been carried out through telephone interviews of 40 associations, field observations and semi-structured interviews with the board members of four selected organisations.

Section 1 reviews the state of the current debate on migrant organisations and proposes a definition of the concept of transnational organisational fields. Sections 2 and 3 present and compare the Polish and Indian Punjabi cases. It is shown that even though they both took root in the UK after the Second World War, they both present very distinct features. While Polish organisations have been networked 'from above', thanks to the political guidance of the Polish government in exile, the Indian ones have spontaneously formed an organisational field 'from below', which evolved towards a diasporic field in the wake of the civil war in Punjab in the mid 1980s.

# 1 Debates and definitions

As pointed out in the introduction, there is a 'migrant organisations paradox' in migration studies. Although immigrant volunteering is present at any stage of the migration process, migrant organisations have always occupied a marginal place in migration theories. Until the 1980s, migrant organisations mostly attracted attention through the role they play in integration dynamics (Breton 1964; Cheetham 1988). A small strand of work focusing specifically on immigrant associations (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005) analyses the propensity of immigrants to create associations, the factors accounting for the forms taken by these associations, and their interrelations within associational fields. This strand, drawing upon institutionalist approaches and sociology of organisations, is largely disconnected from mainstream migration theories.

However, a recent surge of interest among students of transnationalism opens a possible pathway towards a better account of immigrant volunteering in migration processes. Transnationalism is a theoretical framework elaborated in the early 1990s which has become one of the dominant approaches to migration studies in recent years. This approach is a grassroots analysis, focusing on the entanglement of various practices (economic, social, political, cultural, etc.) within trans-border social contexts. It focuses on the one hand, on practices, and on the other hand, on social formations such as transnational communities and transnational social fields. Practices and socialities are tightly entangled. As Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Smith (2002: 13) put it:

> […] without such a sense of shared meanings and a sense of predictability of results bonding together the actors involved, it would be unthinkable for any person to try to establish any kind of relations across national territories whether a transnational migrant network, economic project or a political movement.

This focus on identity processes and practices explains the awkward place of associations and volunteering in the study of transnationalism. The literature on migrant associations is not part of the intellectual foundations of the transnational approach (Levitt and Khagram 2008). First, migrant associations are not in themselves a practice or a sense of collective belonging, but a social institution which enables these things. Second, because of their omnipresence and polymorphism, they are not easily located in the transnational realm. To use Thomas Faist's typology of transnational spaces (Faist 2000), each type of transnational space can be supported by various forms of migrant organisation: hometown organisations are a widespread outcome of kinship networks; business organisations of transnational circuits; political, religious or cultural organisations of transnational communities. By and large, migrant volunteering transcends any attempt to categorise transnationalism along the lines of practices and sociality. For example, religious organisations do not rely on specific

forms of social ties: they can emerge out of primary ties of kinship groups or out of loosely connected cosmopolitan collectives. Finally, migrant organisations do not easily fit into the paradigm of mobility which has underpinned contemporary approaches to migration studies. Volunteering is much more motivated by the here-and-now of immigrant lives than by the collective projection into international spaces. Locally focused organisations are generally more common than those maintaining cross-border ties or activities. Hence the paradox of migrant organisations: if their study tends to support the idea of the marginal reality of transnationalism which would gloss over the fact that the vast majority of migrants still follow the paths to assimilation, they are nevertheless widely present and easily came across when one looks at long-distance linkages.

There is something intangible and elusive about migrant organising which seems to forsake any attempt to use this phenomenon to build up any theoretical framework. As a consequence, migrant organisations have long been confined to the role of illustrating transnational processes. The first paper on the matter, written by Nina Glick Schiller et al. (1992), mentions hometown organisations (HTOs) as one of the outstanding aspects of immigrant transnationalism. The development and religious projects carried out by expatriate villagers (the so-called collective remittances) have proved to be widespread cross-border practices showing the persistence of long-distance belongings. By and large, Peggy Levitt, in her monograph on Dominican transnational villagers (Levitt 2001), showed that hometown associations constitute a crucial institution around which transnational communities build up.

In the mid 2000s, critics of transnationalism highlighting the weaknesses of the transnational conceptual framework led some academics to return to a minimalist definition of transnationalism, as a set of tangible and accountable practices, leaving aside the social processes that underly them (Portes et al. 2005; Portes 2006; Fibbi et al. 2008). Since then, a surge of quantitative studies have attempted to measure the extent of transnationalism among US and European immigrants (Waldinger 2008; Schans 2009). This reorientation towards measurable objects has contributed to a shift of interest from transnational communities to transnational organisations. In parallel, the programme 'tres por uno', which led to the formalisation of the Mexican associational field in the USA, played a role in this surge of interest.[1] In this context, consulates started to maintain datasets of HTOs. The sudden amount of official statistics provided the researchers with the material to carry out studies on the phenomenon. Manuel Orozco estimates that there were 7000 Latinos in the USA in 2000, each of them investing on average US$10,000 a year in development projects (Orozco 2003).

Alejandro Portes et al. carried out the first comparative study of transnational Latino organisations (Portes et al. 2005; Portes et al. 2008; Portes et al. 2009). In Europe, Statham and Koopmans have worked on the impact of transnational linkages on the claim-making process of immigrant organisations in Germany (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Besides the Comparative Immigrant Organisations Programme (CIOP) in the USA, at least two ongoing research programmes aim to document the functioning of immigrant cross-border associations in various European countries: LOCALMULTIDEM and 'Diffusion and Contexts of

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[1] This programme is a co-funding scheme meant to support and encourage development remittances for the benefit of origin areas. For each dollar contributed by HTOs to a given development project, the state and the federal state add two more dollars.

Transnational Migrant Organisations (TRAMO). Migrant organisations are not taken as one among other facets of cross-border activities or socialities but as a unit of analysis *per se*. Interestingly, these programmes have imported into the field of transnational studies the questioning which had driven past research on migrant organisations, i.e., what are the factors encouraging/discouraging/shaping immigrant organisations in the host and receiving countries? What is the bearing of immigrant volunteering on integration in the host country, on development in the origin country? Besides questions, these programmes have contributed to a formalisation of the definition of migrant organisations. The definitions used by the different researchers are rather standard and largely reproduce the one developed by students of 'non-transnational' migrant organisations. Migrant organisations are therefore defined as organisations (characterised by a formal structure and non-profit objectives) of migrants (i.e. composed at least of a majority of foreign-born or having foreign-born parents) (Pries 2008; Morales and Jorba 2009, compared with Moya 2005; Vermeulen 2006). Next to other units of analysis, migrant organisations are becoming a research object of transnational studies in their own right (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2008). Heralding this ongoing trend, chapters on the matter have been published in several recent edited books on transnationalism, including *Diaspora and Transnationalism* (Faist and Bauböck 2010) and *Rethinking Transnationalism* (Pries 2008).

However, this emerging strand of research remains focused on the micro-level of organisations themselves. My intention is to bring to the fore an approach likely to shed light on the role of migrant organisation in informing and shaping transnational spaces. Volunteer organisations do not function as isolated units. They rely on the perceived external expectations and legitimacy of other related organisations to orient their activities and access to external resources such as information and funding. Transnational organisational fields are formed by interlocking networks of migrant organisations whose activities and partnerships span national borders. The concept of organisational field complies with the definition of what Norbert Elias calls a 'relational space', that is to say a space in which the position of each unit, its meaning and function, derive from the position of the other elements and the relation they maintain between each other.

The concept of transnational organisational field introduces a variety of angles. First, it enables us to address the behaviour of specific organisations in relation to their organisational context. Such an approach was, for example, used by Abdelmalek Sayad to study the 'Etoile Nord Africaine', the leading Algerian nationalist organisation based in France between the two world wars (Sayad 1999: Chapter 4). Second, the study of transnational fields as a level of analysis provides an insightful window on immigrant transnationalism and factors which shape its expansion. The formation of organisational fields is mostly influenced by two factors: the composition and structure of immigrant populations, and the politico-legal context in the host and receiving countries. Another factor highlighted by the literature accounting for the forms taken by migrant organisations is the one of leadership and the internal functioning of organisations (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005; Lacroix 2011).

The present paper puts the emphasis on a third possible approach, namely the mapping and structuration of transnational organisational fields (TOFs). TOFs are not homogeneous entities but are divided into subfields sustained by clusters of organisations formed along similar ideological, religious or cultural orientations. They can be described through the hierarchy of distinct sub-fields, their emergence and unmaking, the

relationships they maintain between each other. TOFs can also be characterised by their spatial expansion. Four types of cross-border ties maintained by migrant organisations can be distinguished. They can be translocal when these ties link two locations; transnational (when migrant organisations do not work with a specific location but at the national level of the origin country); diasporic (when migrant organisations maintain linkages with the different countries of settlement of the diaspora); or cosmopolitan (when migrant organisations establish international linkages outside the national group). This characterisation can be further complemented by the pattern of cross-border embedding of migrant organisations. Associations specifically created to carry out activities outside the country of settlement constitute only one type among organisations engaged in cross-border activities. Organisations whose objectives and practices are primarily focused on the country of arrival, but which occasionally support cross-border ties, are another type. TOFs are constituted by associations which exclusively work within the borders of the country in which they are established, but which nevertheless belong to transnational networks or federations. The members of this last type of organisation attend meetings abroad; receive guidance from foreign-based bodies; or partake in international campaigns.

To end this non-exhaustive list of possible uses of the concept of transnational organisational field: it provides a tool to envisage the relation between the transnational and non-transnational activities of migrant organisations. Arguably, immigrant volunteering is mostly motivated by the local needs of immigrant groups. Cross-border activities only absorb a limited share of associational activities. Opponents of transnationalism have put forward that this approach draws an arbitrary line between migrants and transmigrants. By focusing on the continuities which may exist between the different scales of immigrant volunteering, one can highlight the relations which exist between them. By and large, transnational organisational fields must not be confused with migrant civil societies.[2] Jonathan Fox defines migrant civil societies as constituted by the profit organisations and non-profit organisations (such as ethnic journals, internet websites and radios) which delineate spaces of discussion within immigrant communities. He also includes social events such as religious and cultural gatherings, parties which also contribute to the dissemination of information and communication (Fox 2005). TOFs are therefore only one feature of (transnational) migrant civil societies.

The second part of this paper illustrates the use of this concept by focusing on two examples. The first one is the making 'from below' of the Indian organisational field and its evolution since the 1950s.  The second one is the building 'from above'; that is to say by a central political entity, of the Polish post-war diasporic field.

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[2] Some authors contest the existence of transnational civil societies. Debates, claims and needs conveyed by migrant organisations and migrant media remain mostly country-specific. The exchanges between migrant groups transcending national borders are not dense enough to form a civil society sphere in itself. This stance seems however to be challenged by students of Latin immigrant groups in the USA. The concept of migrant civil society put forward by Jonathan Fox (2005) does not make this distinction, and allows for the encapsulating of civil exchanges at the local, national and international levels.
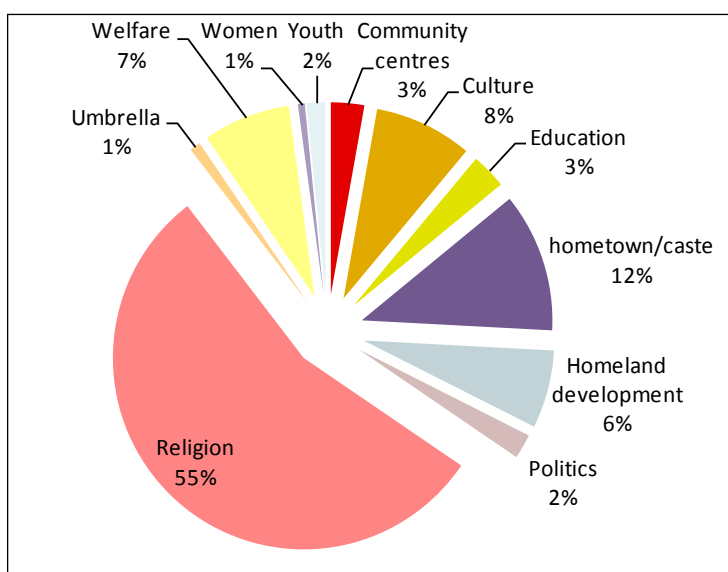
# 2 Migrant organising 'from below': Indian migrant organisations in the UK

Indian organisations proved to be a leading force during the British civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This strong embedding of working-class associations within the immigrant population ended in the 1980s with the surge of the Khalistani movement (a movement supportive of the independence of Punjab during the Indo–Punjab civil war in the late 1980s). The 'Khalistani movement' turned out to be a transition period during which the Indian migrant civil society reconfigured itself. It now reflects the sheer socio-economic, religious, generational, ethnic and political diversity of this community (and, somehow, the strong diversity of India itself). In this section, we will unravel the processes of shifting ethos at play within the associational field, from a working-class focus to a more ethno-cultural one.

## 2.1 Main categories of organisations among Indians in the UK

Today the UK-based Indian community displays highly diversified occupational, cultural and ethnic profiles, yielding, in turn, a composite associational landscape sustaining varied transnational connections with the homeland.

**Figure 1: Indian organisations in the UK**



Source: Thomas Lacroix, 2010

The main divide structuring the organisational field is the religious one (see Figure 1). Places of worship still constitute half of Indian associations. Religious organisations and places of worship represent 55 per cent of the total. The Indian community is divided between six main religious groups (Sikhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Catholicism, Islam), and a wide array of sects and sub-groups within each main branch. However, it would be misleading to regard the other 45 per cent as secular organisations. By and large, one observes a strong entanglement between the welfare, political and religious spheres. Most

welfare organisations (nurseries, weekend schools, sports clubs, health centres elderly care, etc.) have been, to a large extent, taken charge of by religious organisations. Places of worship often host a community centre where after-school classes are organised for youngsters, where women and elderly people can meet and find support. Beyond their religious function, places of worship provide a space around which community life organises, including its political aspects. At the local level, the election of trustees of local temples is often characterised by factional disputes. On a broader scale, political groups have been increasingly linked to religious movements since the mid 1980s. The politicisation of the Sikh identity during the civil war in Punjab and the deployment at the international level of Hindu nationalist networks (Jaffrelot 2005) were conducive to a growing politicisation of religious affiliations. The specific role of places of worship explains the quasi absence of youth, women, elderly organisations and the low number of community centres and welfare organisations. Even umbrella organisations are mostly federations of religious associations. The Hindu Council, the National Council of Hindu temples, the World Council of Jain Academies are cases in point.

The second main cross-cutting divide which structures the Indian organisational field is the one of ethnic-based (hometown or caste) groups (12 per cent of Indian associations). The pattern of ethnic grouping varies from one area of origin to the other. For example, Gujaratis tend to create caste organisations while Punjabis are more prone to create hometown or *Ilaqa* (i.e. a group of villages) organisations. Caste associations are now a widespread form of organisation. They are in fact *biraderi* associations, i.e. caste sections in which youngsters are to be married. They tend to coalesce into international federations acting as a transnational matrimonial institution (the Charotar Patidar Samaj in Northampton and Coventry, and the Gujarat Samaj in Nottingham are two examples). Hometown organisations are networks of people coming from the same place of origin. Since the 1990s, a large number of them have found in development activities a motive to renew their existence (e.g. the Pakowal village association, and the Bilga General Hospital Charitable Trust). A plethora of development projects such as the building of schools, hospitals, sports centres, and places of worship have sprung up since the 1990s in the main areas of departure (Dusenbery and Tatla 2010; Lacroix 2010). Interestingly, their transnational engagement was conducive to greater formalisation. Hometown groups tend to register a formal organisation in order to access external funding made available by migration and development policies.

The secular pillar is the third and, by far, smallest one. Spearheaded by the leftist Indian Workers´ Association and the nationalist Overseas Indian Congress, it was the dominant one until the 1980s. It lost currency during the civil war in Punjab. Alongside the remnant of older associations, a growing number of non-religious associations have appeared during the last decade, mostly in the cultural and homeland development domains.

### 2.2 The making of the Indian transnational organisational field

The longitudinal analysis of the types of organisations and their creation displays the sensibility of the associational field to the evolution of the community. Figure 2 highlights four distinct phases in the development of the Indian transnational organisational field. The first one took place from the inception of migration flows until the late 1960s. The immigration flows from India were mostly composed of young low-skilled men from Punjab.

The first formal organisations around which the community built up were places of worship in rented houses, and self-help associations (e.g. the Indian Workers Association (IWA) in Coventry, created in 1938). Prior to Indian independence in 1947, political associations were founded to support pro-independence movements in India (e.g. the India League in 1929). In the early 1950s, IWA and the India League were re-created (the India League took the name of the Indian Overseas Congress, IAC). They formed the two poles around which the political life of Indian expatriates was structured until the mid 1980s. Hometown and caste networks were the two social institutions which shaped the migration flows. They were conducive to the formation of the first translocal networks which linked places of arrival and of origin. The first development initiatives (the building of schools in Punjab) were recorded in the late 1950s.

The second period started in the late 1960s. The arrival of the 'twice migrants' from Eastern and Southern Africa on the one hand, and of family reunification flows on the other (accelerated by the first restrictive migration policy measures in 1962 and 1968), was conducive to a take-off in the creation of migrant organisations. Places of worship, community and welfare organisations were created to fulfil the needs of a settling Indian population. The dynamics, begun during the previous period, strengthened. Until the mid 1990s, religious, and to a lesser extent, hometown/caste organisations dominated the landscape at the grassroots level, while political associations (IWA and IAC) constituted the voice of working- and middle-class UK-based Indians at the national and international levels. Two parallel forms of cross-border linkages took shape: the translocal contacts maintained by family, hometown and caste networks on the one hand, and the transnational linkages maintained with the communist and Congress parties on the other. Diasporic contacts between organisations established in the different settlement countries were very limited.

The third period was triggered by the sacking of the Golden temple (the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion) by the Indian army in 1984. It led to the formation of a new organisational field, the so-called Khalistani movement, which appeared to frame the wave of discontent within the diaspora. In the UK, the main organisations constituting this movement were the Council of Khalistan, the International Sikh Youth Organisation, Babbar Khalsa and Dal Khalsa (Tatla 1999). The Khalistani movement was based on politico-religious claims: the creation of an independent Punjab and the defence of the rights of the Sikhs. Contrary to the leading associations of the post-independence period, the Khalistani movement formed a web of organisations connected throughout the diaspora. In parallel, the staunch opposition of IWA and IAC to ethno-national claims led to a rapid disaffection of its members and subsequently to a loss of influence within the UK-Indian population.

**Figure 2: UK-based Indian organisations, according to their date of creation and category**



UK-based Indian organisations, according to their date of creation and category

Legend: welfare services, umbrella, NGOs, political, education, culture, community centre, religion, hometown/caste
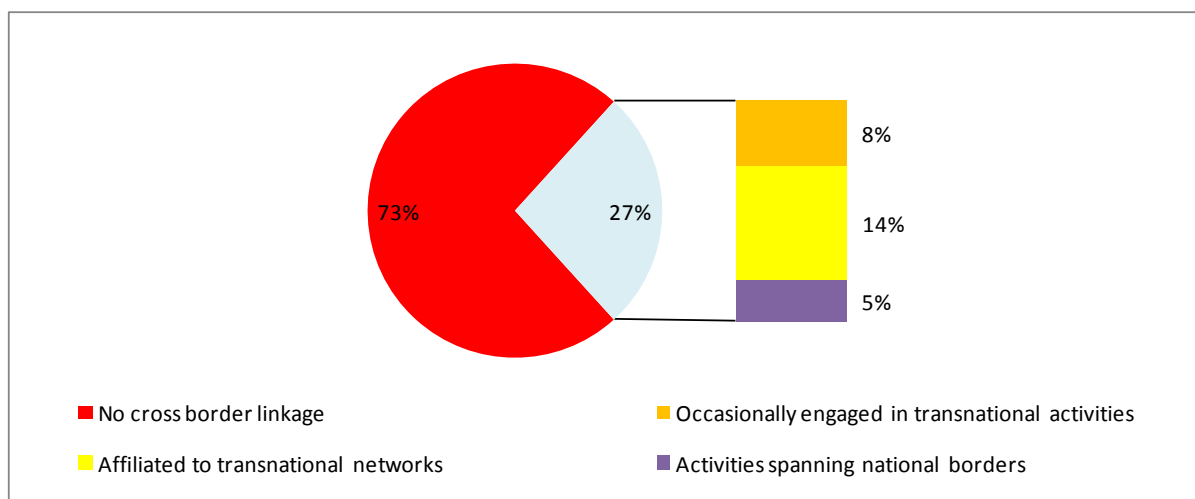
Source: Thomas Lacroix 2010

The 'Khalistani movement' ended with the settlement of the civil war in Punjab in 1992. The post-Khalistani organisational field reconfigured around the defence of the rights of Sikhs throughout the world. This process confirmed the trend begun in the 1980s of a diasporisation of the organisational field. Punjab is now one terrain of activities among others. Some organisations such as the Sikh Human Rights Group and United Sikhs have also started to develop 'cosmopolitan' activities through their participation in the UN human rights commission (Lacroix 2011). This trend of diasporisation is also observed among other religious groups. Transnational Hindu nationalist networks developed throughout the diaspora (Jaffrelot 2005). The Sangh Pariva, a cluster of organisations linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is a case in point. Religious movements have therefore occupied the field of political transnationalism given up by post-independence organisations through producing diaspora-wide networks meant to channel political and financial support towards India. An increasing number of religious activists is committed to cross-border development initiatives. For example, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewa Jatha in Birmingham has carried out several renovation projects of Sikh shrines since the early 1990s, mostly in Punjab, but also in Kenya. Several affairs in the USA or in Britain involving fake NGOs tapping into the diaspora to provide funding to extremist religious groups is a side effect of the increased level of commitment to philanthropic activities (Van Hear et al. 2004: 15). Today, 13 of the 25 top receivers of foreign funding in India are religious organisations (Jayel 2007: 154).

Paradoxically, this dynamic at the global level goes along with a constant decline in the number of creations of new places of worship and a regular increase of other types of organisation at the local level. This is particularly the case for organisations oriented towards homeland development (migrant NGOs), which form the majority of created organisations since 2001. This phenomenon is observed in other domains such as culture and welfare services. By and large, cross-border activities are increasingly common, especially in the domain of philanthropy. Donations to charitable causes have steadily increased, reaching a peak of US$2.6 million in 2007. In 1996, the earthquake in Gujarat triggered massive spontaneous donations from the diaspora.

To sum up, the analysis of the contemporary situation shows a variety of entangled trends. The actual number of Indian associations committed to transnational projects remains rather low. In fact, three-quarters of organisations do not report any engagement beyond national borders (see Figure 3). It seems that transnationalisation trends at play in certain sectors of the Indian associational field are not at odds with a strong embedding at the local and national levels. If one focuses on the remaining quarter having reported cross-border practices, one observes a variety of transnational connections, resulting from half a century of immigrant activism. They can be translocal, in particular in the case of small development projects; transnational; or even diasporic. One of the specificities of the Indian diaspora is to maintain ties not only with the origin country, but also among Indian communities in the main receiving countries (USA, Canada, etc.), or even with communities in former important host countries (development projects supported in Kenya or Uganda by Indian organisations illustrate this specificity). Finally, some organisations have started to engage in cosmopolitan activities (outside the diasporic group), which might prefigure future development of the Indian cross-border activism. Figure 3 shows that the transnationalisation of organisational activities is mostly conveyed by the transnationalisation of organisational networks. Half of the cross-border engagement of UK-based Indian organisations stems from their participation in international federations or

networks. The organisations specifically created to act outside the UK constitute a minority. This suggests a strong embedding of migrant organisations at the local level, but also a porous border between cross-border and non-cross-border-oriented organisations.

**Figure 3: Patterns of cross-border engagement among UK-based Indian organisations in 2010**

As shown in Figure 3, this transnationalisation trend represents a small proportion of organisations. It is however a recent trend with regard to the fifty-year history of Indian associations in Britain and therefore likely to become significant in the decade to come. One must keep in mind that the data rely on the information given by organisations in the consulted databases and websites. It is therefore likely that the number of organisations engaged in cross-border activities is underestimated. The strong variety of cross-border engagements and the multi-polar structuring are typical of a building 'from below' of the Indian transnational organisational field. As will be shown in the next section, the Polish field displays a radically different profile.

## 3 Migrant organising from above: the Polish case

### 3.1 History of Poland and Polish migration

There is no migration more imbued with history than the Polish migration. In fact, migration is part of the founding myths of the nation-state. In 1795, Russia, Prussia and Austria partitioned Poland, causing its *de facto* suppression of geographic maps. Recurrent uprising against foreign rule led to a campaign of stark repression against nationalist movements in the nineteenth century. This caused what is now known as the 'Great European Migration' of Polish people (1831–1870). Since then, each period of Polish history has triggered a wave of migration. The contemporary history of Polish migration started during the Second World War when around 5 million Poles voluntarily or forcibly left their home and another 4.5 million were deported due to the ethnic cleansing policy (mostly ethnic Germans to Germany) between 1946 and 1948 (Iglicka 2000: 62). The refugees scattered around the world; they either went to traditional destination countries (USA, France, UK, Canada) or were sent to refugee camps in the Middle East, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand or Eastern

Africa. Around 120,000 soldiers, civil servants and refugees joined the Polish government in exile established in London after 1940 (Sword 1996). The Polish Resettlement Act (1947) offered British citizenship to the Poles who had fought against Nazi Germany and Soviet Union troops.

With regard to its overall emigration history, the communist period between 1948 and 1989 can be regarded as a bracket with relatively low movement. During this period, any form of mobility was strictly controlled, and emigration to the West was used by the authorities as a safety valve during and after political unrest (in 1956, 1968, 1981). After the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, paralleling the democratic transition, emigration flows kept pace. However, the predominantly political nature of pre-1989 expatriation was replaced by labour migration. In the UK, the number of Polish 'visitors' rose during the period, reaching around 200,000 a year (Düvell 2004). The orientation of the Polish migration system started to change in the late 2000s, when, thanks to the freedom of business creation, a migration industry took root in the UK (Garapich 2008a). When, in 2004, Poland joined the European Union, a sizeable Polish-born population (74,000 according to the UK census) was already settled in the country (Düvell 2004: 4). The objection to adopting a transition period before granting freedom of circulation (negotiated by Germany and endorsed by most European countries) gave another impetus to the reorientation of migration flows. The UK became the first destination country in 2006, before Germany and the USA (Kepinska 2006: 37). According to the Central Statistical Office nearly 690,000 Poles were living in the UK at the end of 2007, 30 per cent more than in May 2002 (Burrell 2009). The 2009 economic crisis seems to have done little to reverse the dynamic. Compared to the pre-accession migration, newcomers are younger and more educated. The vast majority found low-skilled jobs as care workers, in the cleaning or building industry, and in restaurants and agriculture, although a class of entrepreneurs rapidly emerged in parallel with a thriving ethnic economy (Düvell 2004).

### 3.2 The Polish associational landscape

The exploratory investigations carried out on Polish organisations sparked two surprises. In the first place, the mapping of Polish organisations revealed a smaller number of associations than in the Indian case (two-thirds less), for an equivalent population. It turned out, during the preliminary interviews carried out in Birmingham and Slough, that these organisations were tightly connected to a centralised 'organisation of organisations'. The leaders of the Polish clubs contacted were having the same discourse: our relationships with Poland are mediated by London-based organisations. In the second place, contrary to what was expected, the main organisations were long-established, created after the Second World War, often maintained by second- or even third-generation Poles, and none by newcomers. Paralleling the surge of Polish migration, associations mushroomed after 2004. But the emergence of the new organisational field has not been conducive to a polarisation of the associational landscape. The post-war organisational field described by the literature (Sword 1996) was established 'from above', i.e. in accordance with a political project defined by expatriate political authorities after 1945. This set-up did not appear to be significantly affected by the massive arrival of Polish nationals since 2004.

The Polish community in the UK built itself on two pillars, the secular and religious, headed, on the one hand, by the government in exile and, on the other hand, by the Polish Catholic Mission. The Polish civil society's abroad main purpose was the preservation of

Polish cultural practices. This was part of a wider political strategy as the purpose was to maintain a certain Polishness imbued with strong anticommunism. The diaspora maintained (and still does) its cultural cohesion rooted in the imagined pre-war Poland. For example, the Polish clubs throughout the country used to celebrate (and still do) the 3rd of May (in reference to the adoption of the first Polish constitution in 1791) as the national day, a celebration suppressed by the communist regime in Poland. The Catholic pillar includes, in addition to the Polish parishes themselves, a number of congregations and a number of associations such as the Polish YMCAs (Young Men's Christian Associations). The secular pillar includes political and military authorities. After the government in exile ceased to be officially recognised in 1946, it maintained an underground existence until 1989. Its presence made London the main political centre of the post-war Western diaspora. The Federation of Poles[3] was founded to represent the Polish community in the UK to the British authorities. The Federation is, nowadays, a platform gathering 75 Polish associations. The existence of the government in exile came to an end in 1989, when the communist regime collapsed. The last president in exile died in 2010, in the plane crash that also killed the Polish president and his wife. Up until now, the Federation has been the official political voice of the Polish ethnic community in Britain (Sword 1996). The secular pillar is organised around key institutions in charge of the main sectors of Polish community life. The military is structured around the Association of Polish ex Combatants (Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantow). The association was created in 1946 and listed 27,000 members (7000 in the late 1990s). The association primarily took care of the welfare of former soldiers. It supported the creation of hostels, 38 club houses (26 were still active in 1996), adult training courses, Polish Saturday schools and scouting troops, etc. SPK is the UK branch of a world federation whose headquarters are based in London and which counts 24 chapters throughout the world.

Cultural and welfare services to the community are provided by Polish clubs. The Polish social and cultural association was founded in London in 1946, the Polish club in Birmingham in 1947, the Polish community in Leicester in 1948, etc. Their primary function was to serve as a space for social gatherings. Around the Polish clubs, a variety of associations were created as the Polish community grew in numbers in the 1950s: dance groups, football teams, etc. Finally the youth organisations gained importance from the 1960s onwards, catering for the needs of the new generation. Polish Saturday schools mushroomed, set up to teach the Polish language and history. The Polish Scouting movement, traditionally strong in Poland, was also reconstituted in the UK. In practice, the secular and religious pillars are tightly entangled. The relationships between the two pillars are formalised through the presence of religious authorities on the board of the main secular organisations. For example, churches often host Saturday schools. A chaplain at the World Bureau of the scouting movement co-ordinates the relationships between the scouting troops and the Polish Catholic Mission.

After the fall of the communist regime, the post-war organisations, although losing their initial *raison d'être*, did not display any major change. One observes, during the first half of the 1990s however, the creation of continental-wide federations in order to ascertain the representative role of the Poles abroad. The 'Polish Community Council of the World' was founded in 1992, in Krakow, federating the main pre-1989 refugee organisations and
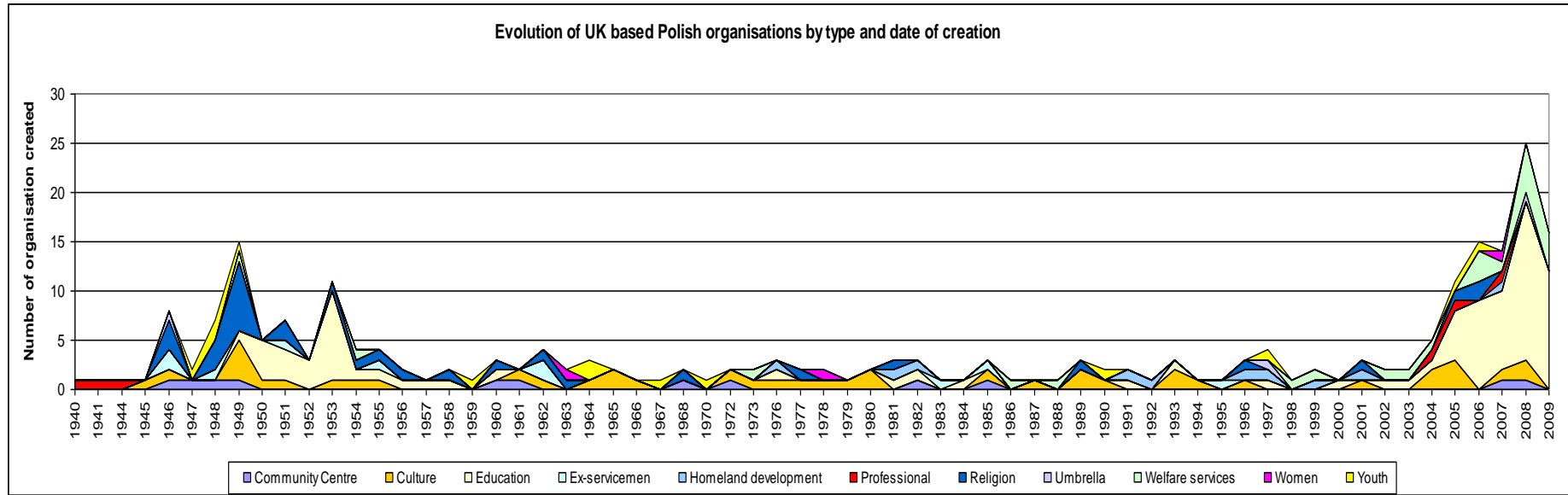
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[3] www.zpwb.org.uk/en

Polish associations established in post-Soviet countries. Other main umbrella organisations are the European Council of the Diaspora created in 1993 (which changed its name to the European Union of Polish Communities in 2000) and the Union of Associations of the Diaspora and Latin America (USOPAL) also in 1993. The post-war associations responded to these changes by re-formulating the terms of their legitimacy. First, the work of these associations is still rooted in a nationalist ethos. They perceive themselves as an avant-garde mandated with the mission to preserve Polish values of liberty and Christianity. Second, the return of the communist party at the top of the state as soon as 1993 (and back again in 2001) gave credit to the idea of a failed de-communisation of the country. Finally, the Polish authorities acknowledged the role of post-war organisations as the representatives of all Poles abroad. As Michal Garapich puts it:

> the Polish state's policy toward its diaspora is deliberately based on an exclusionist policy that emphasises Polish exiles – living proof of the Polish grandeur– and de-emphasizes the post-1989 migration from Poland – an uneasy evidence of Poland's economic downturn and sometimes painful transformation process (Garapich 2008: 13).

In the mid 2000s, after Poland's entry into the European Union, the arrival of several hundreds of thousands of Polish immigrants radically transformed the face of the Polish community, but not in the way nor to the extent that the authors of these lines had expected. In fact, it was anticipated that newcomers would revitalise the existing structures and/or would support the emergence of a new associational sector. Both expectations turned out to be only partly valid. For example, it is estimated that the Birmingham Polish Club receives between 10,000 and 12,000 people each year. The congregation at the Slough Polish Church rose from 400 to 2000 in a couple of years. But if the Polish churches and, to a lesser extent, the Polish clubs, were refilled by new immigrants, that is far from the case for other associations. Our second expectation (the emergence of a new associational field) fell even shorter of the mark. Our mapping highlighted a surge in the creation of associations (according to our census, 25 per cent of Polish associations were created after 2000). The vast majority of these new associations are Polish schools and, to a lesser extent, welfare centres. They primarily target the immediate needs of newcomers. These associations, however, do not transform the overall hierarchical architecture of the existing field. This might, however, change in the following years as an embryonic group of organisations display national ambition. This is the case of the Polish Cooperation Network,[4] which federates organisations created by middle- and upper-class youngsters, such as the Polish City Club, founded by a Polish group working in the City, the business area of London; or Poland Street. As a consequence, the recent immigration waves did not drastically transform the contemporary organisational field. As shown in Figure 4, the historical architecture is still readable in the mapping of UK-based Polish organisations.
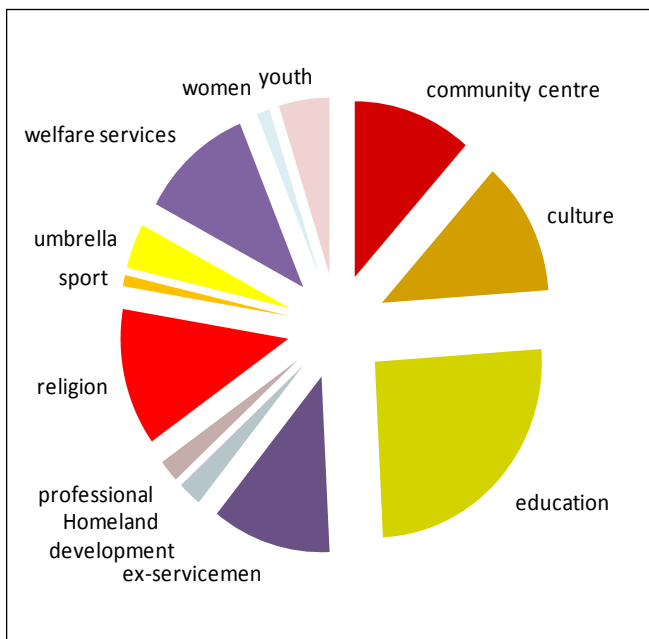
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[4] http://polishcooperation.net/

**Figure 4: Evolution of UK-based Polish organisations by type and date of creation**
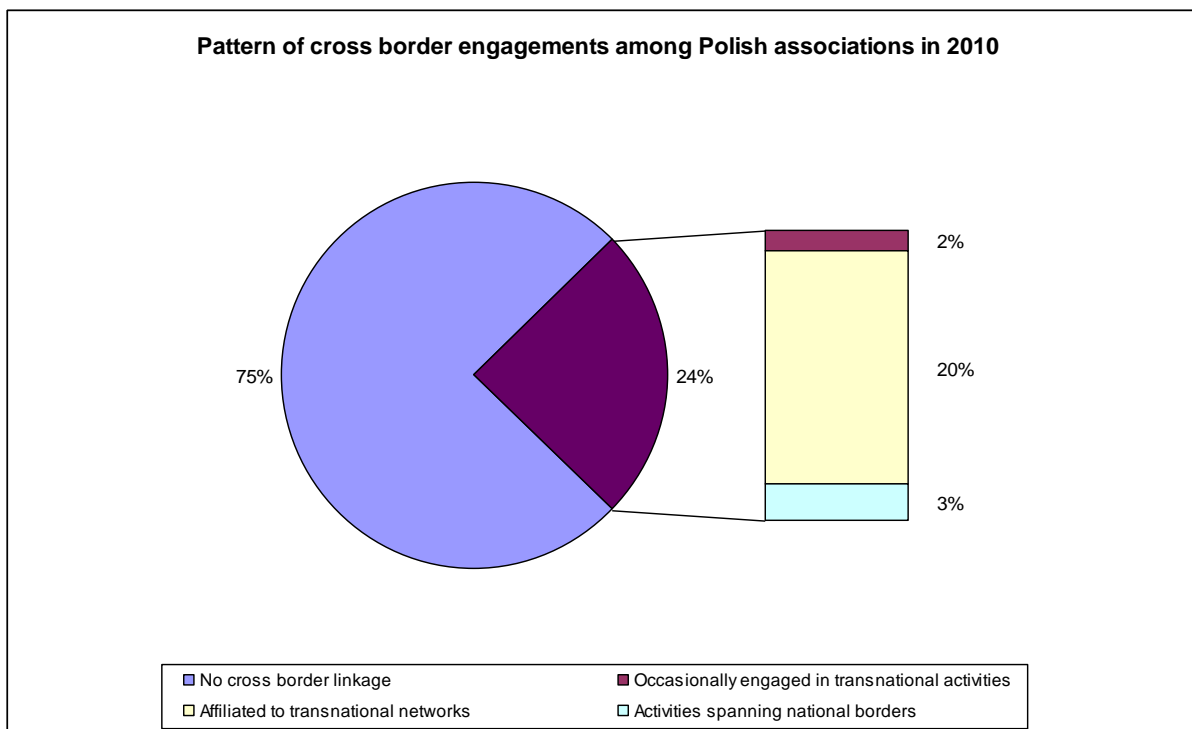


Source: Thomas Lacroix, 2010

**Figure 5: Polish organisations in the UK (2010)**



Source: Thomas Lacroix, 2010

**Figure 6: Pattern of cross-border engagements among Polish associations in 2010**



Source: Thomas Lacroix, 2010

The difference from the Indian organisational field here is striking (see Figures 5 and 6). There is no outstanding prevalence of any particular type of organisation. Polish schools, ex-servicemen associations, religious organisations and their associated associations (community centres, cultural organisations) constitute the bulk of Polish associations. The

level of cross-border engagement is not significantly lower than the one observed among Indian associations (24 per cent compared to 27 per cent). But the hierarchical structure of the organisational landscape is strikingly translated into the pattern of cross-border relations. Umbrella associations such as the Polish Mission, the Polish Association of Ex-combatants, and the UK Scouting Movement mediate the relationships with the rest of the diaspora and Poland. For example, the exile Polish Scouting Movement is headed by a World Bureau based in London. It provides guidance to and regulates the relationships between the branches based in the UK, Argentina, Australia, France, the USA and Canada. The same structuring prevails for the ex-combatant organisation. This form of cross-border embedding is the result of the strong centralisation of a transnational organisational field which stems from the Cold War historical context. The Polish organisational field is a construction 'from above' underpinned by a common political project.

## Conclusion

My intent was to make the case for a better account of organisational fields in the transnational sphere. Although there is an emerging literature on migration associations in transnational studies, most works focus on the micro level of associations, their functioning and their activities. This paper shows that the fields in which these organisations are embedded play a decisive role in the connections they maintain outside the country of settlement. These fields provide channels which orient and shape their cross-border engagements. Another finding highlighted by this study is the diversity of actors who intervene in the formation of transnational organisational fields: individuals, social networks, local and state authorities of the sending and receiving countries, and non-governmental institutions such as the Polish government in exile. The standpoint of the transnational organisational field enables the researcher to grasp the variety of migrant and non migrant actors who take an active part in transnational processes. Finally, this paper shows the importance of the temporality of the transnational phenomenon. The formation of transnational organisational fields is a sedimentary process in which new generations of organisations emerge, insert into and position themselves *vis-à-vis* past organisational fields. The emergence of new clusters of organisations can be spurred by national and international events (such as the secession movement in Punjab or the rise and fall of the iron curtain, or by the endogenous evolution of immigrant communities due to integration, or the coming of new immigration waves). Transnationalism is an approach criticised for its lack of account of historical processes and its disconnection from wider societal contexts. The focus on transnational organisational fields sheds new light on the historicity inherent in transnational processes.

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