

# **Migration and Urban Associations: Notes on social networks in Pokhara, Nepal**

Barbara Berardi Tadié

This paper focuses on the dynamics of migration, social re-organization and associational activities observable in a fast-growing urban area in Nepal: the city of Pokhara, characterized by a heterogeneous and fluctuating population, by massive migration and by a segmentation of the traditional social organisation. It aims in particular at identifying some causal and functional relationships between migration and voluntary organizations in this emerging urban context.

To this end, I will first briefly describe the setting of my fieldwork, the city of Pokhara, sketching the main migration patterns affecting the city (§ 1). I will then give an overview of the multifaceted interaction between migration and voluntary urban associations, and of some of the roles played by associational networks in this context of internal and international mobility (§ 2). In order to show the complex ways in which two voluntary associations operate in this setting, I will, finally, present two ethnographic examples focusing on the rural/urban/rural circulation of ritual specialists and traditions (§ 3).

As I will try to suggest, an analysis of the urban associational network may shed light on social interaction and re-organisation strategies in the city, as well as on some of the consequences of migration and urbanisation in Nepal. It can also help to understand how rural and international migrations are continuously shaping the city and creating multiple ties linking it to its national and international environment.

The data discussed below, unless otherwise specified, are the result of fieldwork conducted in Pokhara from October, 2006, till June, 2007, as part of a research project on civil society networks in that city.

## **Migration patterns in Pokhara**

Pokhara, a small bazaar in the Sixties, with a population of 20,611 inhabitants in 1971, is today the main city of the Western Development Region, with 156,312 inhabitants according to the 2001 census. Its expansion has been extremely rapid, even when compared with the high rates of urban growth which generally characterize developing countries, and is largely due to massive migration over the last two decades.

Internal migration has led to substantial changes in the social composition of the city: the census report of 2001 records eighty-one ethnic and caste groups, while in the early Fifties “there were at most ten to fifteen, mainly caste groups” (Adhikari 2007: 32). The largest groups

(2001) are Bahun (22.8%), Gurung (21.6%), Chetri (15.3%), Newar (10.5%), Dalit (8.7%) and Magar (8.2%).

Migratory trajectories follow three main patterns:

1) 'Classical' migration to the city from rural areas or other minor towns, which dates back to the end of the Seventies, when seasonal migration became permanent (Adhikari and Seddon 2002).

2) 'Triangular' mobility and settlement, where Pokhara does not constitute the working destination of migrants, but their final settlement destination, on returning from abroad. This pattern, particularly widespread in Pokhara, is related to the high percentage of overseas migration characterizing the Western Development Region, which represents 43.68 percent of the country's overall labour migration outside South Asia (Seddon *et al.*, 2002: 23; Wyss 2004: 9). Once back in Nepal, most of these migrants tend to settle in Pokhara rather than in their villages of origin, mainly because of the infrastructures, health and education facilities which the city offers as opposed to the rural areas. This is the typical migratory pattern of Gurkha soldiers (Pettigrew 2000: 8-9), who constitute an important portion of Pokhara immigrants and a strong component of the associational network.

3) 'Temporary migration', which includes those categories of transient migrants passing through the city to travel elsewhere, or living there temporarily (e.g. businessmen, students) without aiming to settle permanently, or regularly commuting between the city and the countryside (see also Adhikari forthcoming). Because of its volatility and fluctuations, this pattern is particularly difficult to document, and data on the subject are scarce.

Thus, Pokhara can be perceived, from the specific perspective of each trajectory, as a point of departure, of arrival, or of transit. As we will see, these migration patterns are connected to voluntary organizations in different ways, and the latter often originate (not surprisingly in such a fast-growing urban contest) in migrant communities. Indeed many associations, both because of their structures and their objectives, constitute a kind of connective fabric with, and between, different categories of migrants, whether older migrants or more recent ones, transient migrants or overseas ones.

### **Migration and voluntary organisations in Pokhara**

The first evidence emerging from my fieldwork is the striking number of voluntary associations in the city: in 2007, there were 433 associations inside the urban area officially registered in the Nagarpalika (City Hall), to which one should add many unregistered organizations, as well as *tol*

(neighbourhood) associations and *ama samuha* (mothers' groups, which are very widespread), which probably double the overall figure.

This network is heterogeneous and includes many different types of associations: cultural, political, religious (e.g. temple membership or faith-based) and ethnic associations, caste and *dalit* associations, activist organizations (i.e. advocacy groups, environmentalists, etc.), organizations providing social services (*samaj sewa*), foundations, clubs (especially youth clubs), groups (e.g. the *ama samuha*), committees (e.g. the *tol samiti*, neighbourhood committees), professional corporations, federations, cooperatives, trade-unions, radio stations. Most associations are community-based, i.e., neighbourhood, grassroots, non-profit associations that seek to address community needs, and whose members usually come from the communities they serve. In most cases, these groups pre-date formal funding opportunities.

In general, there are many variations in terms of size and organizational structure within these organizations. Some are formally incorporated, with a written constitution and a board of members, while others are much smaller and informal. Their distribution, both in the social fabric and on the urban territory, is widespread: from the large ethnic organizations which number thousands of people, to the micro-groups of mothers formed only by four or five individuals, there is virtually no sector of society which is not involved in their network. The same can be observed at territorial level, since all urban areas are concerned, from the central or tourist wards, where organizations literally swarm, to the peripheral areas or the slums, where some groups (i.e. the *ama samuha*, religious organizations or *samaj sewa* associations) are very active (on associations working with *sukumbasi* [squatters], see Yamamoto 2007: 151-154). Such a large number, though in line with a more general trend in Nepal and Nepal's urban areas, is particularly noticeable in Pokhara (see also Adhikari 2007: 19).

Several factors should be taken into consideration if we are to understand this proliferation, such as: 1) the political instability of the country and the consequent weakness of the public administration, which foster the creation of alternative systems of service delivery and group-based mutual aid mechanisms; 2) the century-old associational tradition of many communities living in Pokhara; 3) the input of international donors, whose policy is to enhance the diffusion of Western-type NGOs; and 4) the large percentage of migrants in the urban population. This last point is particularly important in our context, because, as has often been observed in fast-growing urban areas, the creation of voluntary organizations is a typical response of migrants to urban conditions (see, among others, Little 1965). In Pokhara as well, urban migration is at the origin of many organizations, as clearly appears, for instance, in the case of the

associations of the ethnic minorities of Nepal known as *janajati*. In general, the very process of *formally* organizing local *janajati* communities began with the growth of their population in the urban areas, as William F. Fisher has noted in the case of the Thakalis in Pokhara, where their first formal organization (Thakali Samaj Sudhar Sangh) was established (Fisher 2001: 138). In Pokhara, the first ethnic associations were initially created in order to strengthen solidarity among migrants in town and to cope with the difficulties encountered in the urban context. The principal difficulty was ritual practice, since migrants, far from their families, could no longer perform the rituals and ceremonies requiring the participation of the family/clanic/village network.

The main *raison d'être* of the first ethnic associations established in Pokhara was therefore to provide a substitute for the family/lineage/clan/village network of newly-arrived individuals or nuclear families when performing certain life-cycle ceremonies. They also supplied ritual specialists from their communities, logistic support and a physical space needed for major rituals (temples, monasteries, cremation facilities, hall for festivals and so on). With the surge in migration to the city, these organizations mushroomed and often developed into networks made up of complementary structures at local, national and (to a certain extent and especially for certain communities) international levels. The example of the Gurung associational network illustrates this development.

#### *The Gurung associational network*

Over the last four decades, Gurungs (or Tamu) have developed a wide and extremely active network of associations in Pokhara. This network revolves around two main levels in the urban context: the local, neighbourhood level, and the central, headquarters level.

The local level is characterized by small (*tol*, i.e., neighbourhood) organisations, whose main activities include ritual cooperation to support Gurung migrants at the time of certain life-cycle ceremonies and mutual aid among Gurungs in town. These neighbourhood associations act as self-help and contact groups in order to assist newly-arrived migrants in Pokhara, as well as Gurung split households where the majority of their active members have migrated abroad, leaving women, older relatives and children behind (see also Adhikari 2007: 19).

At the central level, with a catchment area covering the whole Pokhara Valley, we find the district headquarters of the national (and international) Gurung organizations, like the Tamu Dhin, the Baudha Argaun Sadan, Tamu Chojja Dhin and the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh, whose general mission consists in implementing cultural, social and religious activities and services targeting the whole urban Gurung community (what is primarily always referred to, in the rhetoric of the activists, as the

“protection” and “promotion” of Gurung tradition). Specific objectives of these central organizations include: 1) developing revivalist initiatives in order to preserve Gurung culture and traditions in the urban context; 2) ensuring a stronger community voice in the political arena; 3) coordinating all the neighbourhood associations, through management of the local network capable, when necessary, of gathering and mobilizing most of the members of the community in town; 4) providing cremation facilities and religious specialists.

The revivalist outlook is a central feature of these associations, and their mission of cultural preservation is continuously stressed, as in this extract from an interview (2007) with the general secretary of Tamu Dhin:

The organization was founded in 2042 BS (1985 A.D.), at a time when the Gurung population in Pokhara was starting to increase. Gurungs coming into the city didn't come alone, but brought their own culture with them. However, interaction and mixing with such multicaste and multicultural environment risked weakening our traditional way of life; for this reason, many Gurung migrants felt the need to protect their own culture, and in order to preserve our traditions [...] we created Tamu Dhin, which now has 37 local, national and international branches.

Tamu Dhin and Tamu Chojja Dhin are mainly concerned with social and cultural activities, while Baudha Argaun Sadan and Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh focus on the ritual sector. Most neighbourhood Gurung associations I surveyed have links with the Tamu Dhin, which works in close coordination with Baudha Argaun Sadan. In fact, the latter constitutes the religious counterpart of Tamu Dhin, providing ritual specialists and funerary rites facilities for those members of the Gurung community resorting to Buddhist lamas for their ceremonies. The other religious organization, the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh, poses as guardian of the Gurung shamanic tradition, and therefore represents the referral religious institution for those Gurungs who also rely on *poju* and *ghyabre* (shamans) for their rites.

These associations are divided into different committees: Tamu Dhin, for instance, is subdivided into smaller organizations in charge of specific sectors of the Gurung community, like the Women's Committee, the Youth Forum, the Students' Union, and has a network of ethnic *ama samuha* (whose members belong exclusively to the Gurung community).

Relationships among these organizations are rather complex, shifting between centrifugal tendencies of political and religious rivalry and centripetal coalitions around common interests and goals, resulting in a multifaceted pattern of competition and cooperation, alliances and scissions.

These central organizations are integrated in the national Gurung network, under the common umbrella of the Tamu Coordination Council (founded in 2000), and have international branches which function in coordination with national branches and involve Gurungs who have migrated abroad. The latter not only maintain contacts with their community and traditions through these international branches, but they are often founders and sponsors of the local/national branches. In particular, retired Gurkha servicemen, who constitute a large percentage of Gurungs residing abroad, have often been the founders of Gurung associations in Nepal. With the necessary social and financial capital, as well as spare time at their disposal, they have played an important role in the development of the Gurung associational network.

Overseas migrants may also actively participate, through the international branches, in the activities of the local/national associations, providing funding and/or expertise for specific initiatives.

But ethnic associations are not the only ones related to rural-urban and international mobility. Other types of urban associations, such as the *samparka samiti*, can also be considered as a direct offshoot of internal migration.

#### *The samparka samiti network*

*Samparka samiti* are “contact committees” in charge of the coordination of migrants coming from the same geographical area. Heterogeneity and the large percentage of transient population characterizing urban demography may account for the dissemination of this type of association, which singles out geographical origin and territorial solidarity as fundamental associative criteria, temporarily bypassing ethnic or caste boundaries (see Adhikari forthcoming). This does not imply that their members neglect other identity affiliations, but rather that in the urban context, and within certain specific situations, geographic origin can play a major role, singling out territorial solidarity as focal point for collective action, rather than ethnicity, caste, religion or gender.

As has been pointed out (Adhikari forthcoming), the mobility of transient populations, building multiple links between the city and their places of origin, is slowly closing the gap between the city and the countryside. Borders are being displaced, fragmented, re-shaped at different micro-levels. In the urban context, *samparka samiti* represent important vectors of convergence and physical places of contact, coordination and interaction among transient migrants and between the latter and older settlers. This convergence has far-reaching consequences: taking into consideration the political level, Adhikari observes that it has resulted in a transfer of the rural political agenda into the urban area of Pokhara, which explains the strategic role that these associations, capable

of mobilizing a large number of people at short notice for the rallies, played during the Jana Andolan in April, 2006.

Nevertheless, despite their weight in the urban fabric, *samparka samiti* remain volatile: during my fieldwork many of them were not active, since their representatives were away from town. The available data would suggest that these associations, like the population they have emerged from, are somehow transient: because their activists do not live in Pokhara on a permanent basis and because of their structural flexibility, they seem to have an intermittent mode of functioning.

If geographical organizations, like the above-mentioned ethnic associations, are directly linked to migration, other associational categories making up the urban network are also—in a less direct way—linked to this phenomenon. As an example, one can mention the *ama samuha*, a widespread type of association in Nepal.

#### *The ama samuha network*

In Pokhara, *Ama samuha* are numerous, with about 130 associations distributed over the 19 wards of the city. Such a network is even more remarkable given that these associations are of relatively recent origin: although the *ama samuha* started to develop at national level only during the 1980s, they are nowadays so rooted in the social fabric that they are perceived as “traditional” (see Biggs et al. 2004). The urban network of *ama samuha* is generally constituted on a neighbourhood basis, even if caste or community affiliations often emerge as associational criteria ultimately determining the groups’ composition. The average *ama samuha* is composed of ten to twenty married women, who form a group in order to implement social services (*samaj sewa*) on behalf of their community (neighbourhood or caste/ethnic community, which often overlap).

In Pokhara, where there are no major constraints to accessing health/education facilities, and where the burden of women’s daily activities is reduced by easily-available services (running water, electricity, gas, etc.), *ama samuha* are mainly concerned with social problems arising from migration (splitting up of households, lack of integration, isolation), unemployment and social misconduct (drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, small-scale delinquency).

For urban *ama samuha* migration is a central issue. As neighbourhood groups they are instrumental in prompting encounters and enhancing solidarity among migrants inhabiting the same area, and between the latter and older settlers. Indeed, this is one of the reasons more often evoked to explain the creation of the groups:

Q. “Why did you create this association?”

A. “Before, we were living in the village, but then we came to live in the city [...]. Now people from everywhere, from the east, from the west,

from everywhere in Nepal come to live in Pokhara [...]; people who have money always come to live in the city, but [here] they don't know each other, they can't get to know each other, so I thought: 'if we have a group of mothers [...] we will get to know each other [...] and if there is a problem and *ama samuha* is there, we can help each other'.

In this sense, urban *ama samuha* create spaces of communication and mutual aid among people inhabiting the same area. The aspect of mutual aid is especially mentioned in relation to the fragmentation of families that the migratory process usually entails, and its negative impact on the most vulnerable members of the household, starting with the elderly:

It's very good to have *ama samuha* [...]; if there are *samuha* then [people] can always get help. For instance, now I live alone with my husband here because my children are abroad. We are already a little old and if we need help, if we get sick or if we have to do anything, like any sort of work or ritual, we cannot do it alone; so if we have a *samuha*, the members of the group always come to help us; also, if there is a wedding or any other kind of ceremony we always gather together and help each other, and we don't have to pay for that; so for this kind of help we really need *samuha*.

Another need frequently evoked during interviews with the founders of these women's groups, when asked about the reasons behind the creation of their associations, was "to get women out of the house". This answer, which is significantly frequent in groups with a majority of recently-arrived members, suggests that the latter often perceive isolation, uprootedness and dislocation as a major concern, especially as they are often separated both from their extended family and from their husbands living abroad. In this context, *ama samuha* also reflect a female response to the psychological difficulties arising from the fact of being a migrant and/or a member of a split household.

Interestingly, the opposition between "inside" and "outside" emerges as a central feature of these women's migratory experience, and associations are considered an effective means of empowerment, of obtaining "strength" in order to "come out" in an urban environment that is often perceived as hostile and dangerous for isolated women. Indeed, the "strength" and "courage" that associations can provide is a leading theme in the narratives emerging from the interviews. This "strength" is acquired not only by being together, but also by learning new skills necessary in the urban setting. The first and most basic of these skills is literacy, especially for senior women, and in effect literacy classes for adult women are one of the most common activities provided by *ama samuha*.



Beside literacy classes, the groups attempt to provide women with a wide range of informal or vocational training courses in order to give them more ready access to employment. Unemployment is often seen as one of the major problems for women in the city, where competition is stronger, access to employment restricted, and the skills developed in rural areas are of little use. Thus, a major aim of these women's groups is to provide new employment opportunities and a source of income. They attempt to do so mainly through vocational training and rotating credit groups. The latter have become extremely popular in Pokhara and often constitute a partial source of funding for international migration.

Vocational training aims at increasing the opportunities of finding a job in the city and, sometimes, abroad. For example, this is the case with vocational training for housekeepers, in which "international" standards are explained and taught to women who apply for international migration because, even if Nepalese international migration is still male-dominated, more and more women are now opting for this choice (see, among others, Yamanaka 2005).

### **Ethnic associations and the migration of traditions**

#### *The Pun Magar association and the kul puja 'Instructions for Use'*

Migration to the city often results in a fragmentation of the social organization as well as in the individual's temporary or permanent exclusion from her/his social (family/lineage/clan/tribe) network. This social and geographical estrangement may prevent migrants from celebrating rituals requiring the participation of their village network, or which are intimately linked to ancestral geography, requiring their physical presence in their places of origin. This is particularly true of certain life-cycle ceremonies and of the cult of ancestors and of the lineage's tutelary deities. It is therefore not surprising that many community associations have been created to overcome the difficulties in performing these rituals, especially as failure to celebrate them could lead to unpleasant consequences.

Let us consider the following example, which I witnessed in 2007, during my fieldwork in Pokhara. B., a Pun Magar lady, was complaining about recurrent health problems, difficulties and conflicts inside her family, and persistent bad luck affecting her household. After several months and numerous visits to the local hospitals, she told me she believed that this was because her nuclear family, now living in Pokhara and in the UK, had failed for some time now to perform *kul puja*, the ritual centring on the cult of the lineage's tutelary deities. It was not the first time that migrants in Pokhara gave me this explanation regarding health problems or adversities, since—theoretically—*kul puja* belongs to that

category of ritual that must be celebrated in the place of origin. For this reason, many of them were unable to perform it. I was therefore rather surprised to learn of B.'s decision to perform a *kul puja* in Pokhara. She explained that it was actually possible on condition that one own the land where the ritual was to be officiated, which was the case for her. However, certain difficulties emerged during the preparation of the ceremony. *Kul puja* is a complex ritual, involving animal sacrifices and the participation of different actors, including a *jhankri* (shaman). The latter is supposed, among other things, to sing the *Karpakeliko Jiwan Gatha* (the story of the life of Karpakeli), a corpus of shamanic songs that constitutes part of the Pun Magars' myths of origin.

However, among those involved in the ceremony, there were disagreements as to the exact procedure to follow and none of the urban-dwelling Pun Magar *jhankris* contacted by the family seemed to master this corpus of myths. Help came through Lamachaure Pun Magar Samaj (a local Magar association), which had published in 2004 a booklet containing a version of the *Karpakeliko Jiwan Gatha*, together with instructions for the ritual, regarding the propitious time to perform it, the preparation and conservation of the liquor (*jaad rākhne*) needed for the ceremony and the list of required materials.

Lamachaure Pun Magar Samaj is an ethnic organization set up in Pokhara in 2001 and belongs to a network of neighbourhood associations, *ama samuha*, and youth clubs. The booklet's foreword is particularly interesting and illustrates certain dynamics informing these urban migrants' groups:

We, Pun Magars, moved from many different rural places to Pokhara where we are scattered over various wards; some of us are now living in Pokhara Lamachaure; I realized that we had many Magar families here, but we were not able to be integrated into a group, and we felt the need to create one [...]. For this reason, I thought that it would have been helpful to create a *parivar samaj samiti* [Lamachaure Pun Magar Samaj]. [Later on], following suggestions by intellectuals and other people from our community, we agreed to create a *mitra samaj* [friends' association]. So, the *mitra samaj* was created in 2058 [2001 AD], as a neighbourhood association made up of Lamachaure Samaj and Bataulechaure Samaj. Puns, Thapas and Ranas, all together created this association. [...]. Nine *ama samuha* [all Pun] are also part of the association [names], and sports *samiti* were created within the Samaj.

The text highlights the causal relationship between the process of migrating to the city, the consequent need to be "integrated into a group", the creation of the Pun association and its participation, as suggested by

“intellectuals and others”, in the *mitra samaj*. It also evokes the systemic dimension of the ideal network of this latter kind of ethnic organization, which should act as a connective fabric between various groups of Magar migrants in the city, coordinating (inter-Magar) neighbourhood associations, youth clubs, and *ama samuha*. The inter-Magar dimension remains somewhat theoretical, however, because in practice, as far as I was able to observe at this neighbourhood level, divisions between different Magar clans tend to reassert themselves, and associations are often made up of only one clan, as is the case of Lamachaure Pun Magar Samaj. This is particularly true of the Pun Magars, for whom the focal point for collective action seems to be the clan (and the geographical origin of migrants) more than the Magar community at large.

The publication of the *Karpakeliko* in 2004 echoed revivalist concerns for the protection of culture and its transmission to the younger generation, which implies a written codification of cultural practices. The explanation given by the author is particularly eloquent in this respect:

Till now, our Pun *jāt* did not have any written history: many scholars/intellectuals are now trying to research this subject, and some books have already been published on Himali culture [...]. I would like to say a few words about the holy gift of the history of ancestors (*purkheuli dan*). This has been offered to the younger generations. Because I respect our forefathers, ancestors and elder generations, I have collected and published this history of Karpakeli's life. I hope that this book will pass on knowledge to many readers and will inspire and encourage coming generations so that they can explore their own culture.

Apart from cultural preservation, we see that the author explicitly mentions the function of “passing on knowledge” to (urban) readers, including the necessary capacities for performing the ritual. Indeed, the pamphlet started to circulate and be discussed among the Pun Magars involved in the preparation of the *puja* at B.'s house (members of the household, neighbours, friends, as well as certain Pun *jhankris* living in the city and summoned for this purpose). However, the support provided by the book and by the local Pun community, including *jhankris*, was apparently not totally satisfying, as B. resolved to call for her native village *jhankri*, who was asked to come and perform the ceremony in Pokhara. The village *jhankri* performed the *puja* and left for the village again as soon as the ritual was over, but not without having first revised the original text, making his own corrections to the version of the *Karpakeliko* and to other parts of the pamphlet.

This example suggests that such associations operate at different levels in the context of rural-urban migration: 1) at individual micro-level, by

providing guidelines for rituals and recalling the myths of the group; 2) at group level, by emphasising the main themes of revivalism, such as the strengthening or re-creation of the community and the protection and transmission of its culture. It is worth noting that this process entails shifting from an oral to a written tradition, with all the implications that such a shift involves (especially the selection and written crystallization of only one version of the myth, which affects the fluidity and semantic polyvalence that characterizes oral traditions). We have also seen that the association initiated this shift by mobilizing different actors in this process, including the village shaman who revised the text and thus took part in making the book.

In this case, religious specialists and religious traditions still seem to circulate from the countryside to the urban migrant community; but we will see, in our next example, that a much older ethnic organization is actually attempting to invert this direction.

*Boudha Arghaun Sadan: urban-rural transfers*

Boudha Arghaun Sadan (BAS) is a large, ‘historical’ Gurung organization, probably the most ancient Gurung association in Pokhara. Officially established in 2035 BS (1978), it has actually been in existence since 2027 BS (1970), coinciding with the beginning of the Gurung migration to the city. Boudha Arghaun Sadan (“Council of Buddhist Funerary Rites”) refers both to the association and to the *gumbā* (monastery) it founded and manages. The association today counts 800 life members and a staff of sixty people (eleven board committees plus fifty other members), while the *gumbā*, which is the first and main one for Buddhist-affiliated Gurungs in the region, has a catchment area covering the whole Pokhara Valley. At the time of data collection in 2007, forty Gurung monks were present in the *gumbā*, following the teachings of the Mahayana (Vajirayana) Nyingma sect.

The history of this association is an interesting illustration of the pattern of Gurung migration to town, of the role ex-Gurkha soldiers played in it, and of the multiple links connecting migration and ethnic associations. The following account is taken from the *Smarika* (“Record”) published in 2059 B.S. [2002 A.D.] by the association itself on the occasion of its 25th anniversary:

Five decades ago, Pokhara Valley was not a developed city as it is today. People from the neighbouring hills had not migrated there yet. However, Pokhara was an essential stop for Gurkha soldiers serving in the Indian and British Armies. [...] After World War II [...] to assist the retired Gurkha soldiers, a Post War Reconstruction Fund (PWRF) was established. [...] In 2013 B.S. [1956 A.D.], the Gurkhas with that fund founded the District Soldiers Board Hospital in Pokhara. [...]

later [...] renamed [...] Western Regional Hospital. The PWRF fund also helped to open the District Soldiers' Board High School in Pokhara [...]. In 1960 A.D., the Indian Government opened its permanent pension camp in Pokhara. These developments created an environment for migration to Pokhara valley. Many ex-servicemen families, especially the Gurungs, started migrating to Pokhara.

People also began bringing their sick family members from the villages to Pokhara for treatment. People in those days did not come to the hospital unless it was a dire necessity. Most of these patients died in the hospital. The Gurung custom requires a lama, pachu, ghyabri, Aashyon and son-in-law to perform the final rites. A few other things are also required to cremate the dead body. The hospital usually required the families to claim the dead body immediately. It was very difficult for the Gurungs to perform the final rites since they did not have a cremation place of their own or a religious organization in Pokhara. That situation gave birth to the concept of Boudha Arghun Sadan.

In 2027 B.S., three ex-soldiers [...] founded an informal committee. This committee collected small donations of fifty paisa, one rupee, and five rupees from the pensioners visiting Pokhara to collect their pensions. With the collected donations, they helped others to cremate their dead relatives. In 2030 B.S., the committee had requested the Pokhara "Nagar Panchayat" (municipality) for a piece of land that the Gurungs could use for cremating their dead ones. [...] The Arghun Sadan that had such a modest beginning is now a well-established and respected Tamu institution. It has served the entire gurung community of Pokhara and surrounding hills for 25 years.

This account highlights the part played by urban health and education facilities in creating "an environment for migration", as well as the strong presence of ex-soldiers among Gurung migrants in Pokhara, the recurrence—among the latter—of the triangular pattern of migration, the role ex-soldiers had in funding and establishing this kind of Gurung organization and their financial impact on the development of urban infrastructures. It also shows that migrants' ritual needs lie at the very root of this association, which, as we have seen, is often the case with ethnic associations in Pokhara.

The lack of Gurung ritual specialists in Pokhara was listed by the *Smarika* among the main reasons for founding the association. But today, after thirty years of Gurung migration to Pokhara, this situation appears paradoxically reversed. As the BAS board members I interviewed in 2007 pointed out, it is now harder to find lamas to perform funerary rites in rural areas:

The problem right now is that all the *lamas* have come to town [because in remote areas the population] has shrunk so much: all

those who can afford it come to town. So *lamas* don't have anybody to sustain them, and in their search for society [*sangh*] they have to come down to town. [...].

This change of situation has brought about a corresponding shift in the association's main objectives. For this reason, BAS is now training 40 monks to be sent to remote villages:

[As a result], if someone dies in the villages they cannot find a *lama* there [for funerary rites], they have to come down to town; so we can send some *lamas* to the villages, [like] a kind of Christian missionary [...] to provide ritual service, lama services to the remote areas, to keep *dharma* going.

Once these *lamas* are qualified [trained], they will be more like missionaries; they will be backed by the association [BAS]. We will back them up, the basic things they know [...], they have to go and stay there, [supported] by the association [BAS] and spread Buddhism.

We can follow the progress of Gurung immigration in town through the shift in the association's objectives, from its initial aim of providing Gurung ritual specialists in the city to the current effort of training *lamas* to be sent into rural areas. This shift reverses (or at least is attempting to reverse) the circulation of religious specialists typical of rural-urban migration, inverting, at the same time, the circulation of religious traditions.

In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that what is exported to the villages represents a specific urban interpretation of Gurung Buddhism (see Tamblyn 2002 on this point) and that, unlike other forms of Gurung Buddhism, it tends to reject cooperation with *paju* and *gyābre* (Gurung shamanic priests) during mortuary rituals. This rejection is motivated by opposition to animal sacrifice that shamans perform on those occasions. And indeed the refusal of animal sacrifice is the main argument put forward by Buddhist-affiliated Gurungs in Pokhara against the shamanic tradition. Interestingly enough, besides the theological remark that "red offering" or "cutting" (i.e. killing animals) is against Buddha's teachings, the main argument against sacrifice, according to the Buddhist exponents of the Gurung organizations I interviewed, was that it was "archaic", anti-modern (see also, for this vision of sacrifice in Pokhara, Pettigrew 2000: 31). Indeed, all the arguments made by Buddhist Gurungs against shamanic practices are centred on the issue of modernity: Buddhism is a "modern" religion, present everywhere and in line with a globalized world, while shamanism (with its ritual constraints, local specificities, ethnic uniqueness, and, especially, its emphasis on sacrifice) is not. In this sense, they establish a clear connection between Buddhism and migration: Buddhism (and the rejection of sacrifice that it entails) is

seen as the most appropriate religion for modern, migrant Gurungs, able to travel and to live anywhere in the world. As the chairman of the BAS pointed out to me: “Try to sacrifice a ram in your apartment in London, and you’ll see that not only does it happen to be very impractical, but you also risk ending up in jail as you probably don’t own a butcher’s licence...”.

## Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a tremendous surge in voluntary associations in Pokhara, a city lying at the very centre of the rural and international migration movements affecting the Western Development Region of Nepal. Not surprisingly in such a fast-growing urban contest, many voluntary associations are related—to varying degrees—to migrant populations, whether older migrants or more recent ones, transient migrants or overseas ones, or with members of households left behind.

Certain associational networks can be considered as direct offshoots of migration, to the extent that they constitute the response by migrants to urban conditions. This is especially true for some ethnic associations, which intervene—from the micro-level of the individual to the macro-level of the community—in the social and ritual reorganization of migrants in the city. In certain cases, these associations have developed into complex networks linking—in what may be called meta-spaces – the rural, urban and international levels.

In these new meta-spaces, associational networks are the driving force behind the circulation of ideas and traditions; they act as mediator between migrants and their own cultures and communities, they constitute the focal point for collective action and, sometimes, crystallize conflicts inside groups. Globally speaking, the expansion and the growing importance of migrant associational networks at local and transnational levels (not only ethnic networks but also inter-ethnic ones, now very prominent) seems to indicate that they will continue to play a more and more central role in Nepalese society, both at home and abroad.

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