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Edwin B. Almirol

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## Filipino Immigrants and Voluntary Associations EDWIN B. ALMIROL

Different authors define "voluntary association" in different ways, often conflicting and sometimes mysterious. Goldhammer, for instance, defines voluntary associations as "those more or less formally organized groups whose membership is by choice or by individual volition."<sup>1</sup> Lowie confesses uneasiness with the term "voluntary association" because "voluntary . . . is often inaccurate" and suggests the term "solidarity."<sup>2</sup> Many Filipinos indeed join "voluntary associations" out of internalized social pressure rather than of their own volition. A Filipino who refuses to join regional and dialect organizations often becomes a target of suspicion and even ostracism. In many cases, recruitment to voluntary associations is done by close friends and relatives, thus making refusal of an invitation to join a refusal of amity and kinship.

Defining "voluntary associations" on the basis of recruitment is therefore not enough; though it is important at least to include Little's definition of them as "institutionalized groups in which

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1. Herbert Goldhammer, "Some Factors Affecting Participation in Voluntary Associations," in *Contributions to Urban Sociology*, eds. E. W. Burgess and D.J. Bogue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 224.

2. Robert H. Lowie, *Social Organization* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948), p. 13.

membership is attained by *joining*,"<sup>3</sup> in order to underscore the fact that voluntary associations are not just based on kinship.

Others have made the expression "voluntary association" synonymous with "shared- or "common-interest association."<sup>4</sup> Lopata, for instance, suggests that "voluntary associations are social groups organized for the purpose of realizing one or more goals through cooperative, normatively integrated activity."<sup>5</sup> This definition ignores the fact that many join associations of whose goals they have not the slightest idea. Furthermore, as many members will readily avouch, voluntary associations rarely achieve group goals and programs through cooperative and integrated activity; association activities are often marked by competition and self-assertion resulting in factions and friction.

For the purpose of this article, I view voluntary associations within a continuum of corporate forms. Brown, in an insightful essay on social classification and corporations, argues well that "voluntary association as a principle is a continuum."<sup>6</sup> M. G. Smith identifies the characteristics of corporate forms as (1) identity; (2) presumptive perpetuity; (3) closure; (4) membership; (5) exclusive common affairs; (6) autonomy; (7) procedure; and (8) organization.<sup>7</sup>

Let us see how far Filipino voluntary associations exhibit these characteristics. (1) "Identity refers to a conception of uniqueness of unity."<sup>8</sup> Ilocano associations do use specific labels to identify, classify, and distinguish themselves as Sons of Narvacan, La Union Circle, or United Bacarreños of America and clearly assume separate, distinguishable, and unique identities. (2) "Presumptive perpetuity simply means that the unity is intended to persist, by virtue of orderly replacement of such members as may be lost

3. Kenneth Little, *West African Urbanization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 1.

4. David L. Sills, "Voluntary Associations: Instruments and Objects of Change," *Human Organization* 18 (1, 1959): 17-21.

5. Helena Z. Lopata, "The Function of Voluntary Associations in an Ethnic Community: 'Polonia,'" in *Contributions to Urban Sociology*, p. 203.

6. D. E. Brown, "Corporations and Social Classification," *Current Anthropology* 15 (1, 1974): 33.

7. M. G. Smith, "A Structural Approach to Comparative Politics," in *Varieties of Political Theory*, ed. D. Easton (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 113-28; idem, "Political Organization," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 12, pp. 193-202.

8. D. E. Brown "Corporations and Social Classification," p. 32.

from time to time by death or otherwise.”<sup>9</sup> This too is a clear presumption of Filipino voluntary associations. (3) “Closure refers to the rules for excluding and recruiting members, while (4) membership refers to the unit’s having an empirical existence, i.e., it has members and is not merely imagined or remembered.”<sup>10</sup> These two conditions are also satisfied. Although it was pointed out earlier that Philippine regional associations are inclusive rather than exclusive, they do in fact set limits to their membership. Members of regional associations are expected to support the group’s activities and projects and to help it financially; through regular dues, the associations define who belongs to them and who does not.

The remaining four qualities (i.e., exclusive common affairs, autonomy, set of procedures, and organization) are closely inter-related and “are processual and primarily internal in their reference.”<sup>11</sup> Autonomy refers to the association’s capacity to regulate its own affairs. Embedded in the set of procedures and organization are rules governing the division of labor, hierarchy, and autonomy. The specific processual functions of voluntary associations are not always clear-cut and well-defined. Selznick describes a typical voluntary association as “skeletal, in the sense that they are manned by a small core of individuals—the administration, the local sub-leaders, a few faithful meeting-goers—and around whom fluctuate a loosely bound mass of dues-payers.”<sup>12</sup> Selznick’s characterization accurately applies to many Filipino voluntary associations.

#### VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Voluntary associations in the Philippines are mostly related to church or school. In Tarong, an Ilocano barrio, Nydegger notes that “the most important of the organizations is the Parent-Teacher Association—similar in name only to the American counterpart. Tarong’s P.T.A. is open to all members of the school district and in theory its purpose is the discussion and effecting of barrio and school programs. In fact, the P.T.A. is a sort of men’s work group composed of barrio leaders who have accepted the

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Smith, “A Structural Approach to Comparative Politics,” p. 117.

12. Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952).

specific responsibility of maintenance and construction. The head school teacher works with the men, explaining projects and ways of obtaining "donations" of materials he cannot get from the government; these leaders then in turn prod their kin-groups and friends to work and donate."<sup>13</sup>

The female counterpart of the P.T.A. is the Tarong Women's Club. It is a volunteer group which gathers funds for building and classroom materials and works out programs for both community and school, primarily programs of home economics. Fund-raising is the main activity. The Women's Club raises money largely through its active members, a number of whom are local leaders and can press their relatives for donations. At Christmas-time, the Women's Club, the teachers and the school children canvass the barrio and surrounding barrios served by the school for gifts, donations, and pledges of money, chicken, etc.<sup>14</sup>

Religious-oriented Filipino associations are numerous. Among the Ilocanos, as throughout the Philippines, the Roman Catholics have clubs organized around specific saints, such as St. Joseph, St. Anthony, St. Jude and others. Organizations related to the Virgin Mary, also known as "Marian cults," have the largest memberships, and of these, the Legion of Mary, the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, and the Holy Name Society are the most popular. All these associations observe the feast days of their respective patron-saints. The members also wear a dress uniform to indicate their specific loyalty. For instance, devotees to St. Joseph wear a dark green dress with a dark green cord-belt; St. Anthony devotees wear a dark brown dress; Virgin Mary devotees a white dress with a light blue belt. (Membership to most of these saint-centered associations is restricted to women; men who wish to join a church-related association join the Knights of Columbus.) These associations offer prayers to their specific saints and ask special favors and intercessions. From St. Joseph, single women ask for husbands and married women ask for family harmony and their husband's fidelity. St. Jude is known as the "saint of the impossible"; he deals with desperate cases. St. Anthony specializes in recovering lost articles, even lost boyfriends and husbands. Virgin Mary is the all-purpose saint; because of her position and relation-

13. William Nydegger, "Tarong: A Philippine Barrio (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1960), p. 179.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

ship to Jesus and God the Father, she can intercede for practically everything.

Filipino Protestant voluntary associations are focused not on saints but on getting new converts to Protestantism. One of the most popular associations is the *Timпойog ti Misyonarya nga Babbai* (Society of Women Missionaries). As the name suggests, it is a women's association which is mainly a support group for missionary activities. The members raise money in various ways—rummage sales, bake sales, carolling, raffles, etc. Money raised go to support local missionaries who are sent to non-Christian, highland areas to proselytize converts. Hymnals and bibles are donated along with medicine and food supplies to the hill people and non-assimilated Philippine groups.

In Negros Oriental (Visayas), "Catholic sodalities are the most numerous, stable, and active non-kin based voluntary associations; the membership is predominantly female."<sup>15</sup> Sometimes there are burial associations which pay members when they or their relatives die. The only other active barrio-based nonelective association is the *union*, a non-kin association of both married and single men and women. This was a direct result of increased christening fees and its "sole aim is to help its members sponsor baptisms at a reduced cost."<sup>16</sup>

Dozier notes that the Kalingas in Northern Luzon "have a mania for organization— school teachers organizing elementary school children into all kinds of work and study committees, and the region sponsoring a peace-pact celebration has committees for a variety of tasks including entertainment, butchering, and clean-up. These committees all have chairmen who must make verbal and usually written reports of their work and the funds expended. There are also a number of clubs for both men and women. One of the most surprising experiences for non-Kalinga visitors to the region of Mabaca is to see at the end of a long and arduous hike over precipitous mountain trails a sign at the isolated house of Lino Taway: *Mabaca Women's Club – Mrs. Lino Taway, President*."<sup>17</sup> Dozier suggests that "the drive for organization among the Kalingas may have its roots in the ambitions of warriors and

15. Donn V. Hart, *Compadrinazgo; Ritual Kinship in the Philippines* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 99.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Edward Dozier, *Mountain Arbiters* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966), p. 123.

*pangngats* (village leaders) to exhibit influence and power." He observes that every organization, whether a temporary committee or a permanent club, has a leader who delights in planning programs and assigning tasks. "There is, however, no record of organizations in the past; tasks which needed to be performed were accomplished by the kinship group, either by households or larger segments of the kindred. Non-kinship organizations such as associations or sodalities of a formal and enduring type, were absent in traditional Kalinga culture. The mediums were and are independent curers and religious practitioners without organization. There were no organizations for occupations, such as blacksmithing, pottery making, or basket weaving. Why then the sudden urge for organization? My guess is that the suppression of headhunting left unfulfilled the Kalinga's need to express leadership. The lieutenant-governors early in the century and later the school teachers—all Americans—were themselves organization-minded and undoubtedly helped reinforce the urge for organization. Thus organizations permitting expression to individual leadership qualities are partial answers to the need of Kalinga individuals to bring attention to themselves."<sup>18</sup>

There is some evidence to confirm Dozier's guess in so far as the growth of Filipino voluntary associations did indeed coincide with the American Occupation (1898-1946), especially after the introduction of the public school system. The role of the American school-teachers, who were also called "Thomasites",<sup>19</sup> cannot be over-emphasized; they encouraged the formation of athletic clubs and other organizations, e.g., Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, PTA, YMCA, YWCA, etc., to help inculcate American values. But Dozier is wrong to conclude that voluntary associations are mere substitutes for displaced traditional structures. There were voluntary associations in many parts of the Philippines where no cultural practices were being replaced.

A Filipino's need to lead and acquire prestige and reputation, was usually met by the extended family network. The Ilocanos, for instance, who never engaged in headhunting, organized volun-

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-25.

19. The American teachers arrived aboard the USS *Thomas*, hence the term "Thomasites". Their arrival was a direct consequence of the Public Education Act of 1902 (or Jones Law) which established, for the first time in the Philippines, a public education system.

tary associations to recruit cooperative labor and to raise collective funds and also as indirect responses to the American presence. The Americans eager to consolidate their new colony, built roads and generally improved communications and transportation; this in turn, enhanced general Filipino political consciousness. Filipino voluntary associations became at least in part expressions of group loyalty and ethnic awareness, vehicles for developing broader Philippine national identity. Philippine nationalist churches, venerating national heroes and institutions, likewise grew and flourished during this period of developing national political consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

#### FILIPINO ASSOCIATIONS IN CALIFORNIA

There are five sorts of Filipino voluntary associations in California: mutual aid, occupational and professional, social and recreational, religious, and regional associations.<sup>21</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive; a number of Filipino voluntary associations fulfill several, if not all, of these functions at the same time. Some associations primarily organized for mutual aid, for example, such as the *Caballeros de Dimasalang* and the *Gran Oriente Filipino*, are also social and recreational associations. The associations themselves do not make clear-cut distinctions; their membership cuts across lines of regional, language, occupational, educational, age and religious backgrounds.

The regional associations thus practice mutual aid, and members value their social and recreational functions. However, members of regional associations are united by their common origin — whether real, imagined, or through affiliation. It is difficult to ascertain when the first Filipino regional association was organized. It is clear however that as soon as the Ilocanos arrived in significant numbers in the mid-thirties, they began to organize themselves, not initially as regional associations, but as 'work gangs'. These work gangs were usually under a leader, who in more cases than not, came from the same region and spoke the same language

20. See Teodoro Agoncillo and O. Alfonso, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1967).

21. For further discussion on the nature and function of these various voluntary associations, see Almirol, E. B., "Filipino Voluntary Associations: Balancing Social Pressures and Ethnic Images," *Ethnic Groups* 2(1): 65-92.

as the men under him. This work gang leader, also called a labor contractor, was responsible for getting farm jobs for his work gang and providing minimal accommodations and meals; in return he received a commission from the farmer as well as a percentage from the men's wages. He also deducted a sum from the men's wages for room and board.

It was the common language or regional origin of their members that united most of these work gangs, and similar work groups tended to do similar work. Ilocano work gangs specialized in the lettuce, asparagus, and sugar beet farms in Salinas and Stockton; Visayan work gangs were most noticeable in farms in Bakersfield and Imperial Valley. Often, members of rival work gangs from different regions or speaking different languages regarded each other, not simply as economic competitors but also as social rivals; they frequently fought on the streets and in the pool-halls.<sup>22</sup> An Ilocano ex-labor contractor admits that he never took a Visayan in his work gang because he could not give instructions in Visayan, and Visayans could not understand or speak Ilocano. Different eating habits and preferences likewise discouraged the mixing of work gangs, as did regional and linguistic prejudice: Ilocanos regarded the Tagalogs as lazy, the Pangasinans as dirty, and the Visayans as irresponsible. The Ilocanos were, in turn, regarded as humorless, stingy and tight-fisted. These factors, of language, social preferences, eating habits, and prejudice encouraged dependence on one's own language and regional groups.

Fortunately, now that the labor contract system has been replaced by the farm-workers unions, and many Filipinos have left California agriculture, these negative aspects of intra-Filipino organizational division and conflict have greatly diminished. Today, many regional associations make common origin a focal point of organization, but membership is open to others. Membership is open to anybody who pledges to support the organization, both in its activities and its finances. Regional associations are now very alike to each other: their membership rules are more inclusive than exclusive; they charge their members from \$5.00 to \$10.00 in annual dues; the members are entitled to cash benefits amounting to \$25.00 to \$100.00 in cases of death. Some of the Filipino asso-

22. Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

ciations also give \$10.00 to newly-married couples who belong to the family of regular members. During rites of passage—birthdays, weddings, funerals—the associations send flowers, presents or monetary donations.

For immigrants without insurance or other financial arrangements for sickness and emergency, this sort of financial support is important. And besides the official benefits, other members of the association usually help out, especially in times of death and sickness. Altogether, the help an immigrant family gets from its association can make the difference between destitution and mere economic crisis. In the 1930s and 1940s, when Filipino families and kin support were scarce, and working and living conditions were harsh, the direct economic benefits of the associations were strongly emphasized and many joined several associations essentially just to ensure their economic protection. During the winter, when farm work was low, members of associations could borrow money, interest-free, from their associations. When a member was sick, he could expect his association to pay a part of his medical bills (sometimes the entire bill if the member was penniless). Associations would at times also pay their indigent members' burial expenses.

Today, the insurance aspect of Filipino associations is slowly diminishing. Since many of the immigrants now get help and medical insurance policies through their jobs, the fear of becoming destitute in this way is now greatly reduced. Nonetheless, as in the 1930s, regional associations in the 1970s provide much support for their members. Members help each other look for jobs, provide accommodation, transport, loans, and introductions to other friends who might likewise be able to provide job information, introductions, and other forms of help. As already shown, in the 1930s and 1940s, membership in voluntary associations and occupations were directly correlated. In order to get a job, one had to belong to a work gang which was usually synonymous with a regional or language association. This correlation between employment and membership in voluntary associations still persists. About three-quarters of the members of Ilocano associations say they got their jobs through the help of friends and relatives, mostly members of the same voluntary association. While recent immigrants look for jobs, friends and relatives often put them up. On average it takes an immigrant three months to find a job, and during this period, he is given a bed and, oftentimes, meals. The recent im-

migrant usually takes the first job he is offered, even when it is less than he might expect or his education fits him for.<sup>23</sup> The assistance the immigrant receives is readily given but with the expectation that as soon as he finds a job, he contributes his share in the household expenses. And even when he moves out on his own, he maintains a debt of gratitude.

In a couple of Ilocano associations, rides are offered to members going to interviews or to find jobs; rides are likewise offered to go shopping, to church, and association meetings. Several associations also supply information on various service and employment agencies. Most regional associations may not have formal programs or objectives to help their members find jobs, apartments, etc., but their members nonetheless are a vital source of information and assistance. The friends an immigrant meets through his association are an essential link between him and the larger society.

Filipino immigrants are confronted by a more complex economy than they have been used to. They have to deal — in a foreign language — with a society which is more heterogenous and impersonal; they have to learn how to sell their skills at an acceptable and realistic price.<sup>24</sup> Joining an association alleviates these problems.

Whether they are primarily regional, mutual aid, or social, voluntary associations also serve as vital focal points for much of the activity within the Filipino community. Ilocano and other regional associations celebrate their respective town fiestas and observe other town celebrations. They sponsor dances, raffles, banquets, and beauty contests; the winner of the beauty contest reigns as the town queen during the fiesta celebration. Beauty contests, generally regarded by younger Filipinos as exercises in extravagant trivia, were and are fund-raising occasions. Raising funds for community activities and projects in a minority population

23. For more extensive discussion on the rampant underemployment of Filipino immigrants in California, see Almirol, E. B., "Ethnic Visibility and Economic Viability," paper presented at the Ethnic Studies Colloquium Series, University of California, Berkeley, 6 December 1978.

24. It is true that English is the medium of instruction in higher education in the Philippines and a passable lingua franca for a majority of educated Filipinos, but competence in understanding and speaking English is relatively poor. Recent Filipino immigrants do not have serious reading difficulties in English but because of heavy accents, ungrammatical constructions and often stilted expression, communication problems can arise.

with low incomes and high unemployment and underemployment rate is not an easy task. Beauty queen contestants sell association raffle tickets, and the one who sells the most is the winner; in effect, her sold tickets are her ballots.

Many association activities culminate on the feast day of their town's patron saint. In their observance of these town fiestas and other celebrations, associations preserve Filipino cultural traditions and maintain social and personal ties. Men and women wear their native costumes, Filipino songs are sung and played to the accompaniment of guitars and *banduria* (a Philippine stringed musical instrument). Philippine dishes are served and reminiscences of the 'old country' are spirited. An active member and officer of an Ilocano Binalonian in Southern California comments that attending association meetings and activities "is like being back home; we exchange gossip and catch up on news about friends here (in America) and at home (in the Philippines)."

Every regional association activity, besides requiring the involvement of its members, needs the participation of members of other voluntary associations. The help of other regional associations is actively solicited, and there results an unending traffic of raffle tickets, benefit dances and programs, banquet tickets, donations, etc. If members of an association attend the annual benefit banquet or town fiesta of another association they can then expect the members of that association to attend theirs. Attending an activity of another association does it a favor, and a balanced sheet of favors must be carefully maintained—otherwise gossip and scandal will force a noncomplying association to rectify the balance.

Many Filipino associations sponsor gambling trips to Reno and Las Vegas, earning some revenue in the form of a commission from the bus company which carries these pilgrims to their gambling meccas. Associations also sponsor volleyball and bowling tournaments, and award numerous trophies to almost anyone who plays. In fact, many associations include in their constitutional objectives the holding of recreational and social activities.<sup>25</sup> These activities provide the members the opportunity for personal con-

25. Several Ilocano members of various associations especially in Los Angeles and the Bay Area complain that since the start of the critical gas shortage in late spring, 1979, association meetings, pot-lucks, and other social activities have been greatly reduced; consequently, opportunities for renewing personal ties and exchanging hometown news are slightly reduced.

tact, which in turn affords the renewal of a sense of belonging and companionship. A young Filipino nurse and a recent immigrant admits that "to live in America is to live in involuntary isolation, especially if you do not belong to an association." For most Filipino immigrants, the voluntary associations provide their social life and friends outside their work. Many older members of the regional associations have known each other since they were young children in their home towns; some of them were school-mates in the Philippines, or lived in the same street there. Such long acquaintance and continued familiarity foster a strong sense of community and belonging.

#### LINKS WITH THE HOME COMMUNITY

Group identity and loyalty is further sustained through links with the home community. Money and books are sent to the home-town public school or parish church. Catapusan observes that "glowing reports of appreciation from the home town for the native sons' donations stimulated an enthusiasm and a desire to organize . . . in order to distinguish themselves and gain more honor and admiration from folks at home."<sup>26</sup> Cash donations, raised through a multitude of raffle tickets, banquets and dances, go to build waiting sheds, to purchase public school and church building materials, to construct fences around the churchyard or town plaza, cement benches, which often conspicuously bear the names of their "stateside" donors. Besides these memorializing town presents, home-town associations frequently send money as well as clothing and canned foods, to flood, fire and other disaster victims.

The generosity of these native sons and daughters may be genuine, but repeated insistence on formal acknowledgment, or on their names being engraved on everything they give, often calls that generosity in question. Yet again, one might interpret this demand for formal acknowledgement as showing a need for recognition and personal satisfaction. (It might also be mentioned briefly that some funds collected for worthy causes have never reached the intended beneficiaries. Individuals, usually association leaders,

26. Benicio Catapusan, "The Social Adjustment of Filipinos in the United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1940), p. 50.

have diverted the funds for their private use. So demands for formal accounting do have some objective justification.)

The eagerly maintained links between the immigrant and the home community are typically those between benefactor and beneficiary. For instance, when a mayor of an Ilocano town was visiting Southern California two years ago (1979), he was hosted by members of his home-town association. During the meeting, he capped his praise for the association members' efforts to help the home community with a request for a fire truck for the town's use. Since then the association has been busy raising the sum required, which might come to over \$25,000. The benefactor-type role of the hometown association also exists in personal terms. A regional association in the Bay Area sponsors a scholarship for two outstanding students from their home-town which allows them to go to a Manila university. The scholars periodically send their grades to the association and include a request for more financial aid.

For many Filipino voluntary associations, assistance, contact and service to the home community is guaranteed in their constitution and by-laws. The constitution of an Ilocano association from Bacarra, Ilocos Norte, for example, stipulates that one of its main purposes is to "help whenever we can in any appeal of assistance from our mother town, particularly in matters which pertain to public betterment; namely educational, cultural, and civic projects for which our aid may be rightfully and justifiably called."

Another link with the home community is the exchange of news, either through letters or through visiting friends. In the 1930s, voluntary association leaders and literate members wrote letters for other members who could not write. Many of the Filipino fraternal associations such as the *Legionarios del Trabajo* and the *Caballeros de Dimasalang* had regular letter-writing sessions; letter-writing was a collective activity. Today letter-writing as an association service has almost completely disappeared. Individual letter-writing however is quite high; out of 100 informants, fifty-eight write home at least once a month, seventy-four write at least once every three months, and forty-eight receive a letter from home at least once every two months. The use of the telephone is generally reserved for special occasions, such as birthdays, anniversaries, or deaths.

Newsletters are another link with the home community. Association newsletters and gazettes are published periodically and sent

home. They carry social news almost exclusively: baptisms, wedding, birthday parties, funerals, dances, etc. Controversial topics and news are shunned, and editorials pontificate more than they provoke. But these newsletters do keep members of the home community informed on current events in the immigrant community. Philippine home-town newspapers, on the other hand, are rarely sent to United States immigrant communities; possibly because national home newspapers published in English are often available in selected newsstands in urban California.

Various voluntary associations also organize trips to the Philippines. Besides enabling cheaper group fares, association-sponsored trips strengthen links with home. When a visiting group arrives home, relatives, friends, neighbors, and often the entire community, welcome the returning sons and daughters in lavish feasting. The "stateside" sons and daughters are expected to pay for the feast and to give gifts, called *pasarabu* or *pasalubong* to everybody who is present. This gift-giving may be seen as a mechanism for status-validation and wealth-distribution for the immigrant group, similar to potlatch practices among Northwestern American Indians.

When a Filipino visits the Philippines, friends and relatives in the United States ask him to hand-carry letters, cash, boxes of candies, toiletries, bottles of coffee, towels, watches, or anything that can be hand-carried or packed in a suitcase. The carrier of news is also the bringer of goods. These requests for delivery, called *padala* or *pao-it*, result in a cumbersome, not to say overloaded trip. The returning visitor is likewise loaded with letters, wood carvings, straw dolls, tailored dresses, and even dried fish. But the satisfaction and excitement of being a social link seems to outweigh the inconveniences that attend carrying other people's goods.<sup>27</sup>

27. The most important link with the home community, however, is remittances to relatives. Eighty-six out of 100 research respondents report that they send money to their families in the Philippines at least once a year, and ninety-one send money on special occasions, particularly during deaths and serious illnesses. There are sixty-eight out of a hundred who send remittances to their families every month. The amount sent regularly ranges from \$50.00 to \$150.00; on some occasions, like deaths and other emergencies, as much as \$4,000.00 is sent at one time. There are several cases of Filipinos going into debt just to be able to send money home.

## RECOGNITION AND REPUTATION IN FILIPINO ASSOCIATIONS

Voluntary associations, besides establishing and extending personal ties and social contacts, provide social recognition and prestige. In the constitution of the Ilocano Binalonians, one of the objectives is "to offer awards and other honors to members and their families to encourage and recognize meritorious achievements." Almost all of the voluntary associations in Salinas award scholarships (average amount of \$300.00) to members' children. During the annual fiesta celebrations, awards are given to outstanding members. Committee citations are given, athletic ribbons are awarded, and trophies and certificates are freely flung about. The competition for such awards is quite energetic; after all, the awards and certificates indicate social recognition and community prestige.

Competition for leadership and prestige within voluntary associations can be very vigorous and determined. Suspicions and hostilities often emerge in association elections, especially, and sometimes schisms occur as a result. Since Ilocano immigrants generally cannot occupy positions of leadership in American society, status-seeking and ambitious individuals have to find them within their own ethnic group. One way of doing this is by being elected to positions of leadership in the various Filipino associations. Competitors for leadership positions are inclined and expected to provide extensive personal, family, and professional information. Candidates for elective posts do not usually restrict themselves to programs and platforms; they publish detailed information about their education and employment, their military record, their accomplishments, awards, church activities, etc. An amazing quantity of mimeographed sheets and printed handbills gets distributed by candidates. Especially noteworthy to an outsider is a mass of personal information that seems hardly germane to evaluating a candidate. For instance, an Ilocano running for a position in a Bay Area voluntary association included in his long handout "married for more than 54 years, blessed in this Holy Matrimony with our professional children all with A-1 performances in their respective careers." He summarized his qualifications as "pioneer, veteran, educator, and Catholic gentleman."

Leading an association can be very taxing without being very rewarding, at least not in monetary terms. Elected voluntary associa-

tion officers are not paid salaries. What these positions bestow instead are prestige and social recognition. The ethnic community, as well as the home town in the Philippines, recognizes the status an individual acquires on being elected to a position of leadership. Such status is not a mere abstract or intangible commodity; it is often converted into substantial and actual advantages for that individual. In other words, the ultimate goals are not always social recognition but the advantages that social recognition brings. Elected leaders often use their positions as leverage for their businesses and other activities. For instance, an insurance agent who is the president of a Northern Luzon regional association has succeeded in selling insurance policies to a large majority of the association members. In his position as president, he is visible to the association and to the community. He then turns his visibility to financial advantage. In another case, an association secretary used its membership mailing list to advertise her own travel agency with very profitable results.

One cannot fail to notice that many leaders in the Filipino community are people whose jobs and activities depend largely on good public relations with its members. Appliance and car salesmen, imported Philippine goods and grocery store owners, insurance and travel agents, beauty shop operators, barbers, realtors, and restaurant managers tend to be very active and visible in association activities and in the competition for prestigious positions. It is not that these occupations determine associatory participation but that the status leadership brings has demonstrable and pragmatic dimensions.

In the 1930s and 1940s, leadership in Filipino associations frequently went to the labor contractor, who further validated his status by being an association leader. There were two important duties that were performed by the association leader and labor contractor. First, he coordinated social activities, projects, and work assignments. Second, he mediated between feuding factions in the associations or in the labor camps. The labor contractor's and association leader's judicial function was legitimized by his power to impose fines on erring and nonconforming members and followers.

Today's association leader does less coordinating, primarily because the ethnic community has become fragmented by factions and personality clashes between leaders of the many voluntary as-

sociations. The coordinating role of the association leader is further diminished by the greater occupational diversity of the association members. Leaders now have a similarly diminished mediation role, but their social status still favors them for *compadrazgo* (co-parenthood) relationships. Leaders are also often asked as donors for prizes, trophies, awards, etc. They are constantly being invited as guests of honor for benefit dances and banquets. Through the *compadrazgo* ties, definitions of extended kinship are established within the voluntary associations. *Compadrazgo* relationships formalize social rules of rights and obligations and acquire a kinship definition.<sup>28</sup> These fictive kinship relationships are often underscored by the members' use of "bro" (short for brother) and "sis" (short for sister) in addressing each other.

In the past, leadership in voluntary associations was unstable and unsettled. Because the Filipinos moved incessantly with the agricultural cycle and job availability, the ethnic community itself was fragile, transient and unstable. In the spring, the Filipinos were in San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys; in the summer, they were in the salmon canneries in Alaska and Washington; in the fall, they were in the grape vineyards in Delano, Bakersfield, and farms in Southern California; and in the winter, they were in the vegetable farms and fruit orchards in the Imperial Valley. Lasker observes that "organizations break up often because all of the officers have removed within a year or two after their inauguration."<sup>29</sup> Due to the transience of the ethnic community, leadership structures were greatly undermined.

Today, however, the Filipino community in California is comparatively stable and settled. Ethnic leadership is now more continuous and established. Lasker maintains that in the 1930s, leadership was acquired not by measurable services to Filipino causes over a period of time, but, "by fleeting recognition of ability, especially oratorical ability."<sup>30</sup>

Leadership abilities today are often determined by demonstrated skills in organizing activities, raising revenues, and increasing association membership. Ability to maintain cordial and

28. D.V. Hart in *Compadrinazgo: Ritual Kinship in the Philippines* provides an absorbing discussion on the structure and function of *compadrazgo* relationship in the Philippines.

29. Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration*, p. 124.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

friendly ties with members of the community is also a very important criterion.

#### ETHNIC LEADERSHIP AND THE LARGER SOCIETY

The prestige a leader achieves is often not confirmed outside of the ethnic boundaries. Filipino leaders generally have difficulty converting their status within the ethnic community for use and negotiation in the larger American society. There is a conspicuous absence of power brokers emerging from the ranks of association leaders. Political consolidation hardly exists. And the very Filipinos who lament the fact that there are no effective and visible Filipino political brokers and intermediaries are the first people to challenge any person who assumes that role.

I have argued elsewhere that "Filipino voluntary associations successfully provide a social framework for inter-personal relations within the ethnic community but lamentably fail to serve as forums for political expression,"<sup>31</sup> especially in the broader context of the American society. Filipinos make little or no political impact on the larger society. This is perhaps because existing Filipino organizations, such as the voluntary associations, do not promote causes. Their members are reluctant to work for long-range social and political goals; and the reasons members typically give for joining voluntary associations reflect their apolitical nature. A large majority of voluntary association members say they join for social activities and to make personal contacts. Voluntary associations are viewed essentially as meeting places, and their leaders are regarded as activity organizers. The American political consciousness of Filipino immigrants is undoubtedly underdeveloped, and this to my mind, is due to the difficulty Filipinos have in viewing themselves as an ethnic block with identifiable and unique interests.

Political indifference among the immigrant population can be traced back to their political socialization in the Philippines. There is a strong tendency to regard Philippine national politics as irrelevant to the day-to-day lives of the citizens: the national government is skeptically viewed as a collector of taxes and a source of other generally unfelicitous requirements. The local government

31. Edwin B. Almirol, "Filipino Voluntary Associations," p. 82.

officials are the only "real" sources of power. The local government officials can give jobs, become sponsors for weddings and baptisms, give monetary help, provide protection and support; in other words, become benefactor patrons. A study of five Philippine barrios demonstrated that the inhabitants regarded the barrio president and other town leaders as providers of local needs such as artesian wells, irrigation systems, health centers, schoolhouses and other projects.<sup>32</sup> Government officials were contacted primarily to solicit personal assistance; 82 percent of the research respondents contacted their government officials to ask for personal assistance or advice on such matters as employment, preparation of documents such as tax forms, bond applications, firearm licenses, etc. Some went to seek settlement of petty quarrels and conflicts with neighbors. There were 10 percent who made personal calls either to express gratitude for a favor which was granted or to have informal conversations regarding plans. Only 8 percent went to lobby for specific barrio projects and to offer help. In another study on Filipino political participation, Pal concurs that barrio people visit government officials primarily to request money for ailing relatives and for tuition fees of their children.<sup>33</sup>

The political consciousness of Filipino Americans still tends to be particularistic and kin-oriented, but important changes seem to be in store. Within the next decade, the Filipino population in the U.S. will have become the largest ethnic group of Asian origin. Perhaps, with a more visible population, a sense of political confidence will emerge. Filipinos can only feel politically confident when they have established a viable socioeconomic status vis-a-vis the dominant white society. It seems to me that the best way for Filipinos to do this is for them to use their voluntary associations to define themselves as an interest group, which can then influence the allocation of economic resources and the redistribution of political power. Only then, I think will they have established the links they need with the larger society.

32. T. Firmalino, "Political Actions in the Barrio," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* 4 (1966): 151-59.

33. Agaton P. Pal, "The Sociology of Politics," in *Sociology in the Philippine Setting*, eds. Chester L. Hunt, et al (Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, 1963), pp. 218-37.

## CONCLUSION

Filipino voluntary associations enable their members to extend and renew their personal ties and to preserve and maintain their cultural and traditional links with the home community. For many of the members, association activities and projects provide them with a social life which they would not have otherwise. Moreover, association activities provide the members an outlet for their ambitions and energies to serve their home communities. The voluntary associations also provide the political arena where individuals desiring to occupy positions of prestige and power can compete with each other. These associations likewise create and foster a social milieu within which members achieve social recognition and self-esteem. Through the extensive network of personal and social ties which voluntary associations provide, economic difficulties are assuaged by mutual assistance and support.

Filipino association members help each other in times of crises, in looking for jobs, in providing friendships, status and prestige, and a sense of belonging. This supportive role of voluntary associations serves to promote immigrant adaptation. Voluntary associations of immigrant Filipinos provide a vital link between the past and the present and an essential bridge between the 'old country' and the host society.